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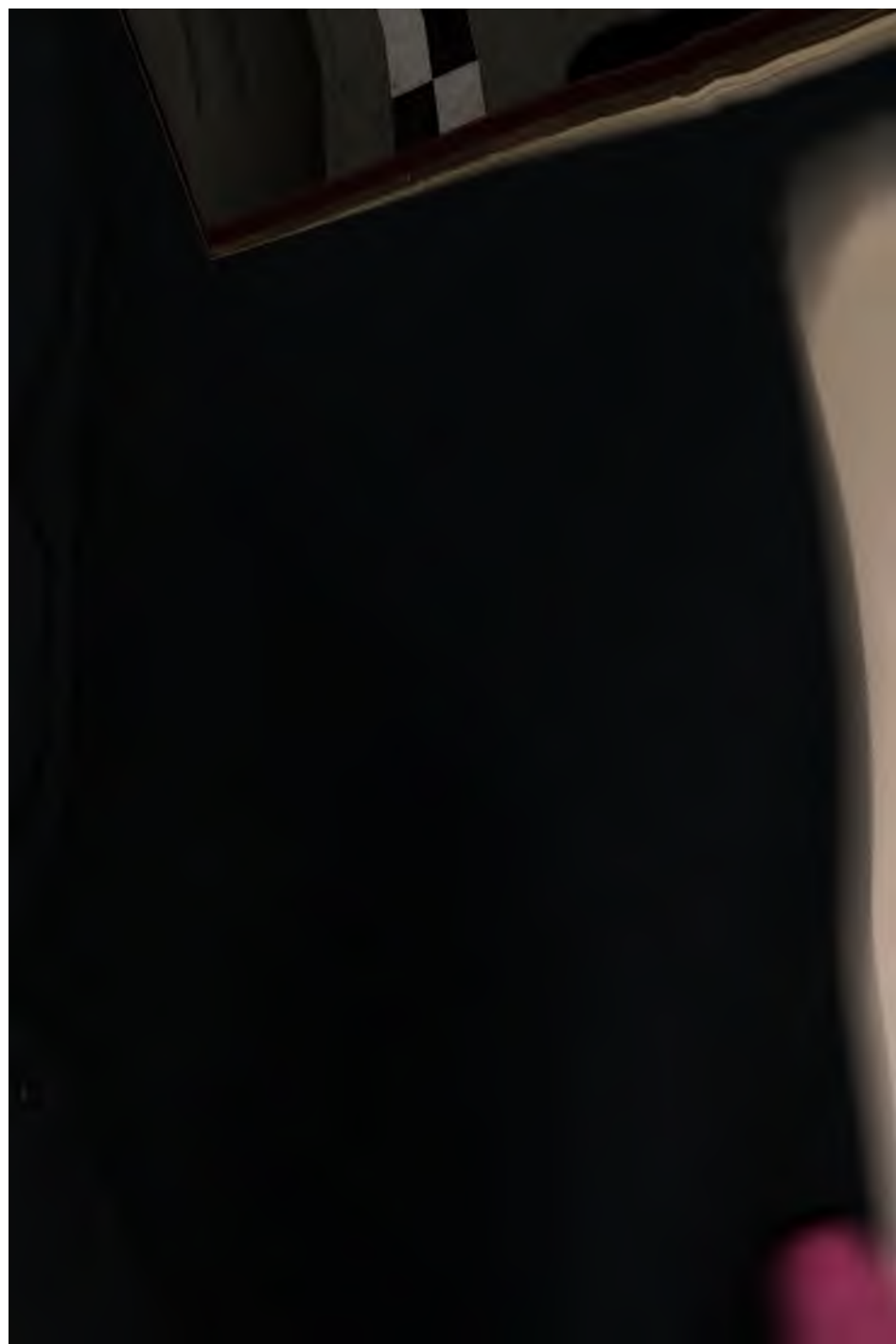
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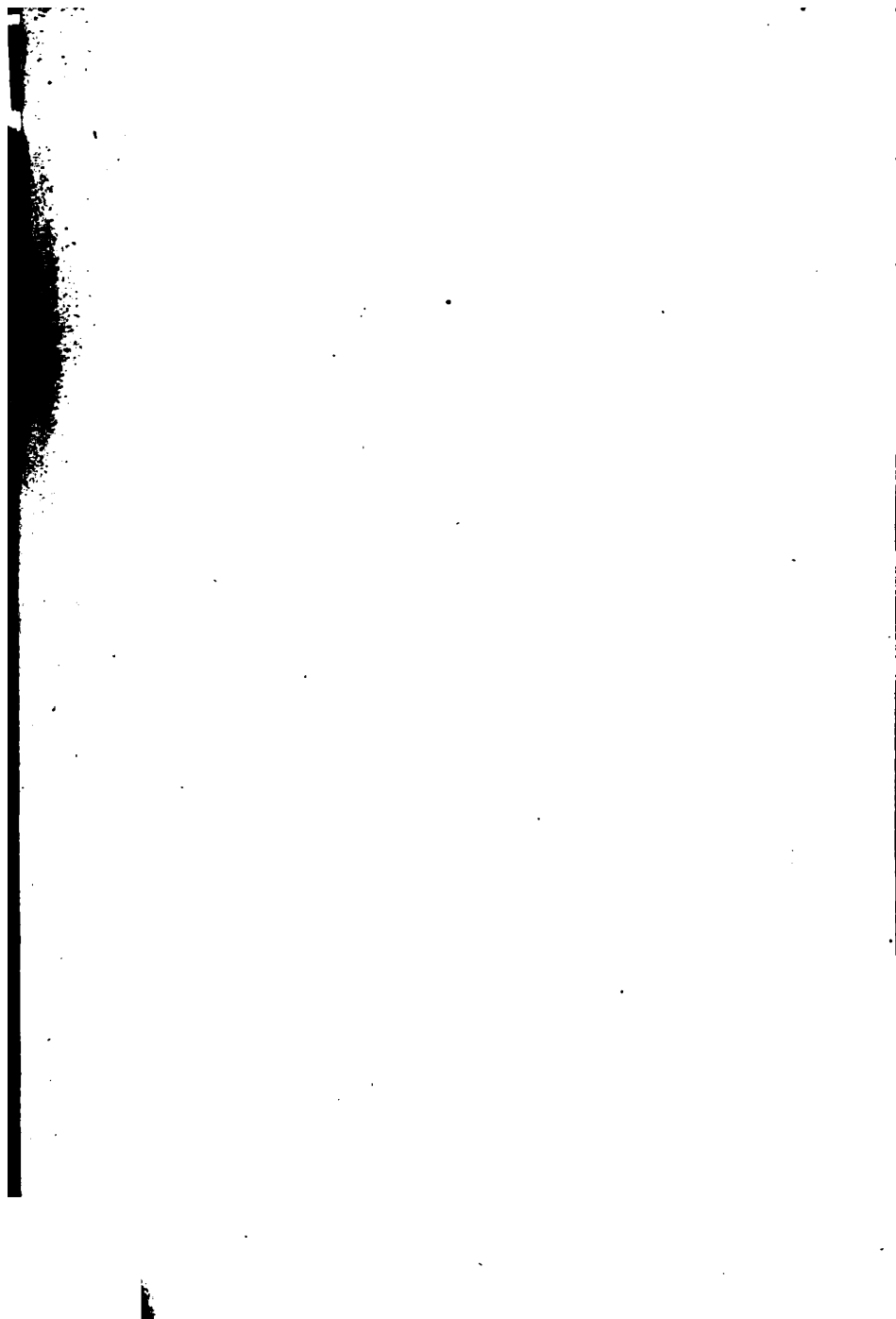
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VOL. III.



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# OVERMATCHED.



## CHAPTER I.

HAD the Fitzwilliam remained on the scene of the late disaster forty-eight hours instead of twenty-four, she would have discovered that, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, survivors of the Castlereagh still existed.

As stated in the Times, on the morning following the cyclone the latter ship was still entire, and continued so throughout the day; but she was dismasted, and wholly unmanageable. The rudder-chains snapped during the night, and the rudder itself was carried away later on; it proved hopeless to replace it, and the ship rolled in the trough

of the sea, the waves breaking over it without resistance. The Fitzwilliam, for the reason stated in the Times, was unable to send any assistance; she had sprung a leak herself, which occupied all hands. But, in fact, no boat could have lived at such a time.

Towards nightfall the weather greatly moderated, and the Castlereagh might then have repaired her injuries. But it was too late; the strain upon her for the last twenty-four hours had been excessive, and she was now breaking up. As each wave struck her, it seemed as if it must complete the work of destruction.

Hitherto, the stern had suffered most; the bulwarks here were torn away on one side, and portions of the underneath planking gone. The forecastle, on the other hand, although shewing some ominous rents, was still entire; and to this, as the place of apparent security, all on board had retreated. Two of the boats had been washed away during the storm; but the long-boat remained, and the order to lower this was now given.

It was carried out as promptly as the increasing darkness permitted. Lanterns were obtained, and the women and children collected at one side, the other passengers behind them. The boat was then stocked with necessaries, and cautiously lowered.

Cautiously ; and, at first, successfully. But it was not to be. As it touched the water, there was some mishap ; tackle or something else gave way, it was never known what, and the boat capsized ; drifted away hopelessly out of reach.

An irrepressible cry arose from the bystanders ; but it was soon subdued. The worst had to be faced now ; and it was faced as it often has been by English hearts, even those to which age or sex have imparted the least fortitude.

Everything that could be done was done ; but it was little enough. Those who desired it were lashed to spars, and an attempt was made to construct a raft. But there was no time for this. The ship's carpenter, it was found, was absent, as were two or three others of the crew ;—washed overboard, it

was supposed, but it was impossible to ascertain;—and this caused some delay. But time would have failed in any case; the supreme moment was at hand.

Malcolm Rayner was among the passengers on the forecastle. He had helped effectively hitherto, as and where he could; now, there was nothing more to be done; plenty of hands for the work going on on deck. He must remain a passive spectator, meeting death as he best might.

Malcolm thought of many things at this time.

Thought of the unseen world before him; so close now, so overpowering in its momentous realities.

Thought of Evelyn, her beauty, her love for him; how she would grieve over his untimely end, should the news ever reach her. Unlikely indeed that it ever should do so. Most unlikely; and in this there was comfort; his own lot was easier to bear, from her being spared this added pang.

And then he thought, penitently and humbly, of his own past; his child's life; his boyhood, with its dreams of poetry and fame; the parents whom he was so soon to follow; the promise which John Rayner had exacted from him. Of small importance that now! Often, since his meeting with Evelyn, Malcolm had denounced this as harsh, tyrannical, unjust. Now, he felt remorse for doing so; it was his own pride, his wounded self-love which had really forged this chain for him—and her; but for these, the promise would never have been given. Ah! well, it was all over now. Father and son would meet ere long, where all anger, all unhappiness, were for ever banished!

Then Malcolm recollected something. In the box which contained his outfit there was a small miniature of his father; one which John Rayner had painted in his leisure hours and given to him. Hitherto Malcolm had not opened this during the voyage; his sense of injury had been too strong. Now,

he felt an irrepressible desire to possess himself of it; he would like to die with this about him; it would seem an earnest of forgiveness between them. Let him secure it while he still might.

He groped his way along the decks, back to the other end of the ship. No one interfered or took notice of him in any way; all were too absorbingly occupied.

There was some star-light, the storm having now entirely cleared off; the lanterns by which the work was being carried on on the forecastle also helped. In quitting the latter, however, he was more than once retarded by the rents of which we have spoken, and which had perceptibly increased; yawning gulfs, over which he found it difficult to step. The cabin end, on the other hand, when he reached it, seemed holding together much better. Might it not be well, Malcolm thought, for the others to return here? He would speak to the captain, at all events, as soon as he had despatched his errand. Here were the cuddy steps.

Malcolm descended them at once. The lamp had been extinguished ; but the place was familiar to him, and he had little difficulty in finding his own cabin, and securing what he came for ; encountering, as he did so, the canvass bag which contained his stock of money, the sovereigns into which he had converted John Rayner's small property. Little need to encumber himself with this dross ! He flung the bag on one side, and had just relocked the box, almost smiling, the moment after, at the mechanical instinct which made him do so, when, to his extreme surprise, he heard voices in conversation close beside him. Not in the cuddy, but just outside the window of his cabin ; the dead light was up, but every syllable was audible.

"Be that you, Mason?" said a rough voice. "Hand us down the keg."

"Take hold, then," was the reply ; "stow it anywhere ; by the tinned meats will do. That's the lot, I suppose, isn't it?"

"How am I to know?" said the first voice ; "the boatswain's got the list. I



wish he'd look sharp, though; the ship can't hold out much longer."

"I expect he's plundering somewhere," said a third speaker; "that would be like Morris: he's a covetous, cut-throat sort of villain."

"You're about right there, carpenter," answered the first voice; "I'm plaguey sorry he's coming with us at all; that Judas face of his has no luck in it. Let's shove off without him; we can't be drowned for his pilfering."

"No, no," said the person last addressed, in whose voice Malcolm now recognized that of the ship's carpenter who had been missing.

"No, that won't do; Morris has the compass and chart; he's picked up some navigation from the mate, and knows how to handle them. Small use my having knocked together this bit of a craft if we've nothing to steer by. Besides, where's Mason?"

"He was here a minute ago," said the sailor who had spoken first. "Plague on these loiterers."

"Keep your cursing for them as it will

harm," said Mason, who returned at the same moment, rolling something on the deck over Malcolm's head. "You'd have done badly without my loitering, as you call it: here's the cask of water which you'd all forgotten."

"We've the rum," said the first speaker.

"The less of that the better," said Mason, "and you shan't touch it without my leave. Mind that, Jim."

"I don't know why I should mind," said the other man, surlily.

"Yes, you do," said Mason. "You know that but for me you'd have been a drunken vagabond, dismissed from the service years ago. You see, Jim," continued Mason, "I've joined you in this matter, which may be isn't the right thing altogether. I didn't join until it was all up with them yonder, and I didn't do it for myself; my life might go fast enough; but there's a wife at home and five little ones, and only me to look to, and I can't help trying the chance for their sakes. Come now, Jim, my boy, you'll help me about the spirits, won't you?"

“All right,” said the other speaker. “But here comes Morris at last. I say, master boatswain, . . .”

But Malcolm waited for no more. The conversation had passed rapidly, and hitherto his intense surprise had kept him fixed to the spot. Now he sprung up the cuddy steps, and hurried towards the forecastle.

“The cowards! the miscreants!” he thought; “they must have been at this work, building their raft, or whatever it is, for hours. Built it on this side too, out of sight of everybody; leaving the women to drown, and sneaking off themselves. *That* shall be stopped, at all events.”

But there are circumstances under which wrong-doing cannot be stopped.

Malcolm’s hand was on the rail of the cuddy steps; the words, “Come here; they have launched something on this side,” were on his lips. He would not wait for any formal communication; let those be saved who could.

But he was too late.

A heavy sea struck the forecastle at the

same moment, and the timbers, shattered as they were in every direction, were in no condition to resist it. A huge mass at his side gave way, and the water poured in like a mill-stream. The vessel staggered; lurched; then made a heavy plunge forwards, carrying with it the helpless crowd on the fore-deck.

A cry, ringing out above the swirl and rush of eddying waters,—a sudden agony, forced from lips little used to such utterance,—and then it was hardly a minute's work. Some of the best swimmers struck out for life, but were swept back into the eddy; those who had been lashed for security were drawn into it still earlier, and still more helplessly. Nothing lived that could live.

Hardly a minute's work. Then, the vessel settled down by the head; not with a sudden dip, as it had done at first, but foot by foot, as the water gained ground.

Malcolm, meanwhile, had been thrown down the cuddy stairs by the shock. He soon recovered himself, and then, holding the rail as before, stood for a moment,

half stupefied, half realizing what had occurred.

He was roused by feeling his disengaged hand lightly touched. He looked round, and, by the imperfect light, saw that there was some one on the steps just below him.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"Me, sir; Andrew Patten," was the reply.

"Andrew!" Malcolm exclaimed, recognizing the steward's boy, to whom he had often spoken a kind word. "How did you come here?"

"I have been asleep, sir," Andrew answered. "It has been hard work all day, and I sate down in the pantry, and fell asleep there, I suppose; it wasn't long after dark then. But where are all the passengers, sir? and what was that terrible noise? it woke me up. What does it all mean?"

"It means, Andrew, that we have only a few minutes more in this world; the ship has broken up, and is sinking fast. Try to meet it, if you can, without being frightened; God is not far from us."

"I am not frightened," said the boy, "at least not much. But is there no help, no hope?"

"Absolutely none," said Malcolm. "The long boat . . . Hold though," he exclaimed, interrupting himself, as he recalled the purpose with which he had come on deck; "hold, they shall save *him* at all events, the miscreants; they can't, and shan't, refuse. Come up at once, Andrew."

Clambering to the side with some difficulty, Malcolm leaned over, and saw what the men had been about.

The carpenter's help had been invaluable; it supplied skilled labour, as well as tools and proper materials, and the raft constructed here was accordingly far superior to that on the forecastle. It was planked; had a small mast and sail, with a place for storing provisions, and was protected at the sides. The four men who composed the party were in their places, preparing to cast off.

Malcolm called out to them. For Andrew's sake, he suppressed his indignation, although with some difficulty.

“ You can take one more ?” he asked.

“ May be we can and may be we can’t,” said one of the party ; a strongly-built seaman, who took the command, and in whose voice Malcolm recognised that of the man addressed as Mason. “ One more is one mouth the more : have you victuals ?”

“ It is not myself,” said Malcolm, “ it is the steward’s boy ; he is close behind me. Here, look,” he added, making Andrew change places with him ; “ you’ll take him, will you not ?”

“ No, we won’t,” interposed the carpenter, whose name was Freemantle ; “ we’ve shifted for ourselves, and he must do the same. I say, we shall be swamped if we stop here talking any longer ; cut the rope, Mason, if you can’t unfasten it. What are you doing there ?”

“ Going to take in that boy,” said Mason decidedly, “ so you may make the best of it. And hang me,” he added, “ if I don’t take the other too ; he’s a plucky chap. Give us your hand first, boy.”

The vessel had sunk so low by this time

that there was little difficulty in stepping on to the raft ; but Andrew hesitated to abandon Malcolm. He was allowed no choice, however ; Mason lifted him as if he had been a feather's weight, and placed him at the further end of the raft. Then he addressed Malcolm.

" Now, sir, are you coming ?"

" No, I am not," said Malcolm firmly.

" Aren't you ?"

" No," repeated Malcolm. " I do not choose to come with you."

Mason mused for a minute. " I see how it is," he said ; " you think we're acting badly in getting away like this. May be we are, but I'm not going to argufy it : you will make your choice. If you like to stop there and drown, I shan't prevent you ; but I shall put the boy out too : it must be both of you or neither. Now, look sharp ; which shall it be ?"

Malcolm still hesitated, but for a moment only ; even if he was justified in throwing away his own life, he must not risk his companion's. And Mason evidently meant what



he said; his grip was on the boy's collar already.

"I believe you are right," he said, stepping down and taking his place. "Thank you for it."

Some murmurs at this addition to their numbers arose from two of the party; and the carpenter, a thoroughly selfish man, was inclined to rebel openly. But he found no support. The boatswain had been, as was suspected, on a raid for plunder when the shock occurred, and was thoroughly cowed by it; he sat with his head between his knees, incapable of anything but the feeblest remonstrance. And "Jim," the third seaman, supported Mason.

"There's lots of room," he said; "give the young gentleman a berth, carpenter. Now then, Mason, cast off."

The rope was untied immediately, and they pushed from the side of the sinking ship.

Only just in time. As the water gained ground it settled down more rapidly; heeling over, at last, with a suddenness which

must have drawn the raft into its eddy, had it not been for a square-sail which Mason had rigged to their mast. This filled, and carried them into safety;—so far as the term could be used by the occupants of a few deal boards, keel-less and rudderless, launched at midnight on the stormy breast of the Atlantic!

The gale was now over, but a high sea ran, and neither eye nor hand could be spared throughout the night; the utmost vigilance was required to prevent their being swamped. The sail, with a light breeze which had sprung up, helped to keep the raft steady; but this was all. Whither it was carrying them, or what to do beyond the present necessity of keeping afloat, there was no time to speculate.

With the morning however came a total change. It was the heart of summer, and every trace of the storm had vanished. The swell against which they had battled so long died away as if by magic: the June sun

shone out over a sea of glass; even the breeze sunk almost to nothing;—the sail filled now and then, but next minute it flapped against the mast again.

The present peril was over, and a meal could now be taken; Mason gave out the rations. Their stock was as scant as it well could be; some preserved meat, a bag of ship biscuit, and the keg of rum; enough to keep life going for a few days, but nothing more. A scrupulous division was made from these; then they consulted as to their course.

From daybreak, every eye had been strained in the hope of seeing the Fitzwilliam, but she was nowhere visible: nothing visible anywhere but the mass of waters, now motionless, and sparkling in the sunshine.

The next resource was the ship's chart. The distances run every day were scored on this; and an observation taken by the boatswain enabled them to ascertain their position.

It appeared that their sail had carried

them further than they supposed. They were now twenty miles from the scene of the wreck ; and unfortunately, in the reverse direction to that which the Fitzwilliam would follow. Help from her therefore was out of the question.

"What is the nearest land?" asked Malcolm, who had been listening to the discussion in silence.

"The Azores," said the boatswain surlily, without looking up from the chart.

"How far are they?"

"A hundred miles, I daresay," was the answer.

"We might easily get there then," said Malcolm.

"Yes, very easily with this infernal calm. There was wind enough and to spare two days ago, worse luck."

"Which way does land lie?" asked Malcolm?

"Over there," said the boatswain, pointing; "the way we came last night. That was our plaguy luck again: if there'd been light to see anything, we might have been

making the islands with that side-wind. Now we've got to run the whole back again."

"If we got back exactly where the ship went down," said Malcolm, "we might find the long-boat, or pick up something useful."

"Not a bad idea that for a landsman," interposed Mason: "we'll try it. Hand us that bit of canvass, Jim; I'll rig out a top-sail if I can. No fear of upsetting to-day."

The canvass was stretched, and proved of some service, but not much; by nightfall, they had hardly retraced a third of the distance. The same through the night, and next day; long past noon before the scene of the catastrophe was reached. And the Fitzwilliam, as stated in the Times report, after remaining there for twenty-four hours, had left at day-break!

Nor were Malcolm's anticipations realised. The Fitzwilliam had taken the boats on with her; and although masses of wreck, with numerous corpses, were still floating about,

nothing of value could be recovered. The spectacle was too terrible to allow of longer stay; and, after securing the few articles worth taking, they set sail by common consent for the Azores.

## CHAPTER II.

AT first the raft had some success ; a light wind again sprung up, and thirty miles were made during the afternoon and night following. Then, once more, hopeless and baffling, settled down the calm which was their worst antagonist.

The sails were useless, and other expedients were tried ;—ludicrous enough, if, under such circumstances, the grotesque and the terrible did not lie side by side ;—handkerchiefs stitched together and hoisted above Mason's topsail, sheets of old newspaper hung out ; anything to catch a breath of air. But quite vainly. The lightest fabric opened sky-ward hung motionless ; drooping like the tattered colours one sees in a parish-church, dedicated from some field of carnage years before.

It would have been well had the raft itself remained equally without movement. But the sea is never still. Remove the pressure from the wind, and its own forces come into play ; battling elements, held in subjection by external rule, but which, like a mutinous democracy, start into conflict when this is absent. Left to itself, the "orb-encircling river" of Homeric geography breaks up into myriads of currents ; uniform and ascertained, some ; others absolutely capricious.

The raft was now in the track of one of these latter, flowing, unhappily, in the reverse direction of the land they were making for. Its pace was slow, but it bore them perceptibly backwards. Oars were of some use : the material collected from the ship supplied them, and they were kept going night and day, enabling them to hold their own, and a little more. But little enough ; hardly a league was gained in the twenty-four hours.

Two days passed thus, and still no change. No cloud, no breath of air ; nothing to break



the monotony, still less to augur succour. The Castlereagh had been compelled to run before the cyclone, and they were now far out of the usual ships' track; no sail appeared, no vestige of life anywhere; they seemed to have reached some untravellered region, from which hope was excluded, and in which the elements were combining for their destruction. The long days were almost interminable; the sun's disc hardly disappeared before its course recommenced in the opposite horizon.

Two days passed; then, on the third, provisions ran short; water had failed still earlier. Mason dealt out quarter rations, with some murmurs; the murmurers, of course, being Morris and Freemantle. It was difficult to choose between these two men. Morris was the more hardened villain; but the intense selfishness of Freemantle made him almost more dangerous.

And now all check upon them was to be removed. On the afternoon of this third day Mason succumbed; the sun struck him,

and he breathed his last some hours afterwards. It was hardly suffering. He fancied himself at home ; had one child on his knee, and told his wife,—“Jenny,” as he called her, how much he had saved for them. Jim and Malcolm lowered the corpse, both with uncovered heads, and the latter repeating over it some remembered words from the burial office. It was the only funeral rite they could perform !

But the end was approaching for others also.

The fourth day rose, hotter than its predecessors : the sea absolutely without movement ; not even the current against which they had so long contended :—to have felt its ripple would have been almost a relief now ! Food too had wholly disappeared ; what remained was pilfered after Mason’s death. Easy to guess the perpetrators, had it been worth while ; but it was not ; thirst was a worse adversary than hunger ! The only other incident of the day was some whispering which passed between Morris and the

carpenter, but Malcolm took no special note of it. Then night fell once more.

This night's rowing would have fallen to Malcolm and Jim, and the former took his oar accordingly; but Jim was replaced by the boy, Andrew Patten; he relieved the others as he could, and when he offered now, Jim acquiesced. Almost mechanically, as it seemed: he was powerfully affected by Mason's death, and seemed hardly conscious of what he was doing. The other two men soon slept.

About midnight, as nearly dark as it could be at that season, Malcolm observed that his companion's rowing slackened.

"You are tired," he said.

"I will stop for a few minutes, sir, if you please," Andrew answered. And he shipped his oar accordingly, Malcolm doing the same.

But the boy did not remain in his place. He rose cautiously, and approached the two sleepers, bending over each in turn. Then he crept to the end of the raft, and taking

up something which lay there, returned with one finger pressed to his lips.

"What is that?" Malcolm asked, lowering his voice.

Andrew, in reply, placed a revolver in his hands. "Poor Mason's, sir," he said in the same key. "I knew he had it; and, when he died, and no one was looking, I hid it away."

"But what am I to do with it?" asked Malcolm.

Andrew shuddered. "Save me from those two, sir," he said. "It isn't their killing me I should mind, but the other thing; I couldn't bear it."

"The other thing? what do you mean?" asked Malcolm. In spite of himself the pre-sage of something very terrible presented itself for the first time.

"They are very thirsty, sir," Andrew whispered, "and if there is no help by to-morrow they are going to draw lots. I heard my own name, and that made me listen, and I overheard almost everything."

"Draw lots?" Malcolm asked indignantly.

"Do you mean . . . But it shan't be; it would be simple murder."

"It *is* murder really," said Andrew, drawing closer to the speaker. "It was to be one of us two, and they fixed on me as the easiest mastered; the lots will be all a sham. Mr. Rayner, you will protect me, will you not?"

"Either that, or die with you," said Malcolm. "But Jim there has nothing to do with this, surely?"

"Nothing, sir; he wouldn't join."

"Will he go with us, then?"

"He'd be no use, sir," said the boy; "he doesn't know what he is doing. He seems ill altogether; a kind of fit he has, twitching all over; he can't keep still. I watched him while I was rowing, and it's been much worse the last half-hour."

"I will go to him at once," said Malcolm, who had examined the revolver meanwhile, and now placed it in his breast pocket. As he did so, Andrew exclaimed, "Quick, Mr. Rayner; quick! He will be overboard!"

Malcolm sprang up. The sailor had risen, and was staggering to one side of the raft, clutching with both arms; before Malcolm could reach him, he reeled and fell heavily into the water. Malcolm watched the spot, but to no purpose; the shock, or some further seizure, proved at once fatal. Nothing more was seen of him.

"What is that?" asked Freemantle, who was roused by the movement.

Malcolm explained what had happened. "It is quite hopeless," he added; "he can't come up now."

"And a good riddance too," said Freemantle. "And now, youngster, get to the oar again; what are you stopping for?"

Malcolm was struck by the insolence of the man's manner; the change was most marked.

"He means to make himself master," he thought; "then they will carry out their villany. Well, if it comes to that, I shall use Andrew's present without scruple! The miscreants!"

A few more hours passed, and then the struggle came.

Morris and Freemantle, for their own sakes, took the oars in the morning; the other two were palpably exhausted. They rowed in silence for some time; then the whispered colloquy began once more. Hardly whispered now; a few words which reached Malcolm's ear showed that Andrew was correct.

Presently Freemantle shipped his oar and stood up.

"We've something to talk to you youngsters about," he said, "the boatswain and myself; we've made up our minds about it. There's four of us in this hole of a place together, and we must just do what others have done."

"What is that?" asked Malcolm, as temperately as he could.

"Help each other to keep alive," answered Freemantle. "That is," he added with a sneer, "one of us must help the others to."

"With all my heart," said Malcolm, who had his hand on the pistol while he spoke,

and now drew it out ; " with all my heart. I've been on the look-out for birds all this morning, and I daresay I could bring one down ; I'm a tolerable shot."

Morris, who was a coward in grain, turned pale at the sight of the weapon. The carpenter, although equally surprised, affected to laugh.

" Not a bad idea," he said ; " some roast fowl would be a treat just now. Where did you get that thing, by the way ? Let's have a look."

He stepped forward as he spoke, but Malcolm was on his guard.

" Better not come nearer," he said, " or I might shoot you by accident instead of the bird."

Freemantle recoiled in spite of himself. Malcolm's blood was up, and there was something in his look as well as in the steady aim with which the revolver was pointed, which overcame the man's hardihood. It was not natural to him ; merely an off-growth from his intense selfishness ; and he could not face this risk.



Malcolm saw his advantage, and broke the ice.

"I have something to talk to *you* too about," he said, "cowards that you are. But first of all, go back to your seat, Freemantle."

The man obeyed, entirely crest-fallen.

"Now take the oars again, both of you," said Malcolm.

This order was also complied with, and Malcolm resumed.

"Now for our talk," he said; "it will not be a long one. I know perfectly what you want to do, and I am determined you shall not do it. You two men will keep entirely to that end of the raft; you will row when I tell you, and leave off when I tell you; you shall have sufficient rest, but that is all. If either of you quits his oar without my leave, or makes one step forward this way, he shall be shot down like a dog. Now I think we understand one another."

\* \* \* \* \*

Another twenty-four hours.

During the greater part of them,—the day of which we have just written and the night which followed,—Malcolm kept watch without intermission ; almost without moving hand or muscle. Need enough to do so ; it was the keeper with a couple of wild beasts ! They were cowed for the time, but once let his eye be off them, and they would make their spring.

For himself, suffering as he was in mind and body, Malcolm cared but little ; death would have been welcome, even with this added horror. But no remissness of his should endanger his companion ; he had promised Andrew protection, and the promise should be kept at all costs. Andrew himself was suffering less. He was young and more inured to privation ; this night too, Malcolm insisted on his sleeping. The two men he kept at the oars till day-break ; then they rested, but without quitting their places. Malcolm himself took no rest throughout the night.

But this could not go on. As the morning

advanced, he felt that his powers of endurance were becoming exhausted.

The weather, fortunately, had become less sultry; the sky was still cloudless, but there were indications of a possible change before long; at times too, a light air sprung up, although too little to sail by. But Malcolm's thirst this morning was extreme; madness as it would have been, he could have lapped up the water which sparkled beside them!

To this succeeded, as the day wore on, an intense drowsiness. Sounds and sights, things hundreds of miles away, presented themselves as realities; the raft, and the figures upon it, became indistinct. He was in their old dining-room in Gower Street. He was teaching in the school where he had found employment when John Rayner's troubles began. He was sauntering in the lanes and meadows during some holiday of his own boyhood. At length, he found that, for some half-dozen seconds, his eyes had actually closed. He had slept!

This would not do: life and death hung on his vigilance.

He made his decision at once. Better allow himself, with necessary precautions, the repose which was indispensable, than have it steal upon him unawares: the men were still sleeping, too, so the risk was lessened at present. For one half-second he thought of shooting them where they lay. But no! anything sooner than that!

Beckoning Andrew to him, Malcolm whispered his instructions: Andrew was to watch, and at the slightest movement to rouse him immediately. Then he stretched himself on the raft, the revolver close to his hand, and, in one minute, was wrapped in profound slumber.

## CHAPTER III.

NOTHING occurred for more than an hour. Andrew watched unremittingly, as he had promised to do ; Malcolm and the other two slept.

The only circumstance which threatened to divert Andrew's attention was the re-appearance of the current : the raft, which had been perfectly motionless, now again glided forward ; slowly at first, but afterwards at a brisk pace, some knots an hour. His heart sunk within him. Here was this opponent once more, undoing the whole toil of the last few days ; bearing them further from land, from the possibility of rescue ! Should he tell Malcolm ? But no : a glance at the sleeper, enjoying the repose of which nature stood in such sore need, decided him not to.

Another half-hour, and then one of the two men at the other end awoke; the carpenter Freemantle. His back was propped against the planking at the end of the raft, and he made no attempt to change his position; merely opened his eyes. Again Andrew thought of rousing Malcolm, and again refrained: there would be ample time should any movement be attempted. Besides Freemantle was not really awake; look, the eyes were closing again: sometimes closing and sometimes opening; evidently, still dozing. Andrew decided to do nothing at present.

But he little knew the antagonist with whom he had to deal.

In the first moment of waking Freemantle saw his advantage, and was considering how to use it. Erelong, the mode suggested itself.

For a further quarter of an hour, he lay as before; then, still keeping his place, he rubbed his eyes and looked round him. First on one side of the raft. Then on the other. Then, at a point in the horizon nearly behind where Andrew sate; taking no notice

of the latter, and hardly more of the object, whatever it was, at which he did look ;—the vacant, purposeless stare of a man newly restored to consciousness.

But, quite suddenly, a marked change came over the face ; surprise, incredulity, intense joy followed each other like flashes of light. Straining forward, he exclaimed, still without rising,

“ Look, Andrew, look quick ! A sail ! ”

“ A sail ! ” Andrew echoed. “ O ! thank God ! Where is it ? ”

“ There ; almost behind you ; over your right shoulder. Look ! ” And, this time, the speaker quitted his seat, and made a step forward, pointing in the direction indicated.

In his excitement, Andrew forgot everything. Turning his head, he scanned the horizon far and near ; but in vain.

“ I can't see . . . ” he began.

But the sentence remained unfinished. As the words left his mouth, he was grasped by a powerful arm, and thrown to the further end of the raft, where he lay stunned and

motionless. Then Freemantle passed on to Malcolm.

The latter was already roused and preparing to fire. But it was too late; he had only time to throw the revolver overboard, and then the death-struggle began.

It was protracted for some minutes, Malcolm's youth and spirit promising to be more than a match for the sinewy frame of his opponent. But Morris was now awake also, and hastened to his companion's assistance.

After this, it was short work. Malcolm was overpowered; his arms and feet tied, and Andrew similarly secured. A few sneering sentences followed, mainly intended for Malcolm's ear, in which Freemantle informed his companion of his successful stratagem. Then, fierce and passionate, the men's craving surged up within them, hurrying eye and hand to their task.

"This one first," said the carpenter, pointing to Malcolm. "The young cock crowed loud enough yesterday, but he'll find it another story now. 'Shoot us down like dogs,' would he?"



"Yes, I would," said Malcolm ; "murdering dogs as you are. If you were men, I would ask you, by the God that made us, to spare, not me, but that boy yonder : my blood, if your thirst demands it, you should be welcome to. But you are not men ; you are savages ; devils."

Freemantle made no reply. While Malcolm spoke, he had been feeling for something in his pockets.

"Give us your clasp-knife," he said to Morris, "I can't find mine."

Morris opened the knife, and was about to hand it, when his companion stopped him. "Hold a bit," he said, "we shall lose the very thing we want. Cut over to the other side, and see if you can't find that can of Mason's."

"What can?"

"The one that he used to serve out the water in ; it will be where the things were stowed. Look sharp."

Morris ransacked the place, but without success. "It's nowhere here," he said, "it must have gone overboard. Halloa ! though,

what's this? Why, there's something in this."

His search had displaced the tins which had held the preserved meat, and he now drew out the bottom one from the heap. It had been opened like the rest, but tied down again with sacking; the present contents evidently fluid. Morris drove his knife into a corner of the sacking and smelt.

"*Rum!*" he exclaimed; "here's a go! How did this get here?"

Malcolm heard the question, and could have answered it; he was the only person on the raft who could. Before their water failed, Mason had drawn off the remaining spirit and concealed it where it was now found: Malcolm could be trusted, and he told him what he had done. "I'd a mind to throw it overboard," he said, "but we might catch some rain-water, and it would be useful; if anything happens to me, you'll know about it. But don't you touch it by itself, and don't let them; it's worse than death." Malcolm promised compliance, and so the matter ended for the time.

But Mason's precaution was attended with important consequences now.

Freemantle heard the boatswain's exclamation as well as Malcolm, and turned round instantly. Morris had dropped his knife, and lifting the tin with both hands, was already drinking through the slit in the sacking.

A tiger's bound or two; bringing Freemantle to the boatswain's side.

. A struggle, foot to foot, hand to hand, sinew to sinew. The tin forced from Morris's grasp; dropping, but without spilling much of the contents.

A heavy fall. Both men prostrate on the planking of the raft: still gripping and tearing at each other. Freemantle uppermost, but held from escape by his antagonist.

A final, deadly pitting of the whole life-forces, man against man. Morris thrown over on one side. Freemantle victorious, his left hand creeping upwards to Morris's throat; the right could not be spared. The movement was slow; caution was indispen-

sable ; scant coercion in one hand even for a fallen man !

It was so slow, that it turned the tide of success the other way !

Morris's whole faculties were quickened by his danger ; every sense roused. His eyes had closed in falling ; now, as he opened them, they fell on the clasp-knife. It lay where he had dropped it, all but within his reach !

A desperate recoil upwards, the muscular force globing itself, as it were ; Freemantle's hold loosened, for one half-minute. But that half-minute was enough. The knife was secured, and pointed, in the instinct of self-preservation, where it must be at once fatal. A heavy groan, half-oath, half-prayer, and then the carpenter rolled back lifeless.

Morris was master of the field, but for several minutes too terrified to realize his safety. He sate down ; wiped the perspiration from his reeking forehead ; opened waistcoat and shirt for air. Then, he lifted the can of rum once more.

Undisturbed this time; a long, heavy draught; satiating even thirst for the moment.

Inspiring, as such draughts do, various pseudo-virtues.

Courage the first, falsified into bravado. He turned to his late antagonist, kicked the prostrate body; leapt upon it; finally, applying hand and foot both, flung it overboard, where the current, by which they were borne along with increasing force, soon sucked it under.

Then followed some form of bonhomie. Morris drank again, and then carried the tin over to Malcolm. Not over steadily; already the liquor had begun to tell upon him; he reeled as he crossed the raft.

"Drink," he said to Malcolm; "drink away. Don't bear malice, youngster; it was Freemantle's doing, not mine."

"I can't drink while I am tied," said Malcolm, who hoped to profit by the man's condition. "Just unfasten this knot here, will you?"

But Morris was still too sober for this.

“Unfasten the knot?” he said; “not such a fool as that, quite. Drink if you like, and don’t if you don’t like; the stuff will last all the longer.”

Another draught and then another, with snatches of boisterous song in the intervals, the man’s intellects becoming more confused every minute. Then a new idea suggested itself.

Morris’s special pilfer had been the cuddy plate; he had packed this loosely in a covered basket, and it lay on the raft near him. Unopened as yet; the circumstances had not been propitious; let him examine it now. He placed the basket on a bench in front of him, and began sorting the contents.

Attempting to sort, that is; the liquor was gaining head every minute; the man becoming less and less conscious where he was, or what he was doing. Two or three larger articles lay on the top; these he took out first, and laid by themselves on the bench. Then he made a separate heap of the forks. Then tried to arrange these into large and small.

But here the alcoholized brain refused its office. Instead of laying down the fork he held, he kept it in his hand, staring at it with drunken gravity.

"Curse it all," he said, "what's this? I'm sure I don't know. Best pitch it into the basket again."

He tried to do so, but missed his aim, and threw it over the side of the raft instead. Without a moment's hesitation, he followed it. Not jumping into the water, but simply stepping in; too intoxicated even to know that it was water.

But the shock sobered him at once. He rose to the surface and called frantically for aid. "Andrew, save . . . save . . . I can't swim. Mr. Rayner, save me!"

Malcolm would have helped, but he and Andrew were fast tied. 'The wretched man had to drown before their eyes.

He rose twice afterwards, imploring succour as before; then sank for the third time and disappeared.

It was some minutes before Malcolm

could shake off the horror of the late scene ; but it was imperative to effect their liberation. The boatswain's knife lay on the floor of the raft ; if this could be secured, the cords might be soon cut. Malcolm tried to reach it, but felt powerless ; his head burning, but the limbs almost numbed. But a few words to Andrew explained what was wanted, and the boy, young and supple, worked himself forward and got the knife between his teeth. Sawing the rope against this, he released one hand ; then freed himself entirely, and did the same for his companion.

But Malcolm could not rise, even now ; Andrew placed a bench behind him, and he leant against this, partly sitting up. As he did so, he became aware, for the first time, of the movement of the raft.

"Andrew," he exclaimed, "we are in the current again."

"Yes, sir ; I noticed it while you were asleep, and it was partly that which prevented my watching properly. It is running fast now, sir ; much faster than it did before."



"Yes," said Malcolm feebly. The fever was striking rapidly at heart and brain; even the effort of speech became intolerable.

"It will carry us right away again, I'm afraid," continued the boy.

"Right away? how do you mean, Andrew?"

"Away from the land, as it did before, sir. Only then we had the rowing to help us."

"We will row now," said Malcolm, rousing himself by a powerful effort; "we must throw away no chance. Give me one of the oars; I can pull sitting here."

Andrew went to fetch the oar, although with reluctance; Malcolm was evidently unfit to use it. But he was stopped by an exclamation from the latter. "Yes, yes; I am quite sure of it."

"Sure of what, sir?"

Malcolm made no answer, but looked at his watch; then at the current; then at the position of the sun, which, although it was past noon now, was still high above the horizon. At length he spoke. Very faintly

now ; even this trifling exertion had reduced his strength still further.

“ Andrew,” he said, beckoning to the boy ; “ come and stand by me here.”

Andrew obeyed, leaning his head down to listen.

“ *This is a different current,*” Malcolm whispered. “ The old one went with the sun, east to west ; in pulling against it, as the boatswain told us to do, we rowed away from the sun all the afternoon, and towards it all the morning. Don’t you recollect ?”

“ Yes, sir, of course I do now,” said Andrew eagerly.

“ Not exactly towards it,” Malcolm continued, “ at least not after the early morning ; as the day got on, we kept more and more to the left. So, no doubt, that is where the Azores lie ; to the north-east of us, that is. But now look at this current ; it is going the same way too ; going away from the afternoon sun. Don’t you see ?”

Andrew clapped his hands, and was about to reply, when he observed a sudden change in his companion.

The effort Malcolm had just made was his last struggle against the fever: now, the overtasked frame succumbed to it. He sank back, incapable of speech or movement; retaining only the consciousness of a pain which racked every fibre.

Once only,—he could not have said after what interval of time,—Malcolm became aware of something distinct from this; an angry roar, apparently close beside him, like that of a wild animal at bay. The rest was an absolute blank.

## CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Malcolm recovered the perception of surrounding objects, they offered a striking contrast to the circumstances in which he had last found himself.

A large, shady room, exquisitely cool; the air perfumed with the scent, as he soon discovered, of orange-trees in full bearing. Himself in bed somewhere. By the bedside, a table of carved wood, with lemonade and fruit upon it. Watching him, from the foot of the bed, a pair of the most lovely eyes that Malcolm had ever seen, or dreamt of.

He had been asleep, apparently, before this fairy-land dawned upon him; he felt very drowsy even now. Some words rose to his lips; and Malcolm then became conscious, in addition to the eyes, of a deli-

cate white finger raised as if in prohibition. He was too languid to dispute the point, and dozed off again.

When he next awoke, nature had achieved a further recovery. He recognized in himself some curiosity,—anxiety, it might be,—as to whether the eyes would still be where he had last seen them.

No, they were not there. Not at the foot of the bed, that is. But the owner, a girl of fourteen or thereabouts, was seated at no great distance, and on hearing Malcolm move, again came forward and looked at him. And, this time, Malcolm's comprehension took in face as well as eyes.

A face repaying perusal, unquestionably, even in its present scarcely emergent childhood.

Extreme innocence, its most obvious trait. Latent under this, although it was equally obvious that they could never master it for evil, the forces of a deeply emotional nature; affectionate, impulsive, self-devoting. Side by side with both, a quick sense of humour, disguising itself under a shy, grave exterior.

The features themselves, as well as the figure, were exquisitely moulded ; the complexion the clear olive of the south, while clusters of bright hair pointed, in part, to a more northern extraction.

"Where am I?" asked Malcolm, when a glance had satisfied him of these particulars.

"Oh ! you must not talk, please," said the maiden, raising her finger as before. She spoke in English, but rather slowly, and with a marked foreign accent.

"Must I not?" said Malcolm ; "why not? Who are you?"

No reply this time, but the finger again raised.

"But surely you will tell me your name?" Malcolm persisted.

Being of the less robust sex, his companion gave way. "Yes, if you will promise, promise not to speak any more. My name is Ere-merinda Maria Govia Figariada Santo Josè Eleanor Arbuthnot."

"Dear me!" said Malcolm, who, weak as he was, could not forbear smiling. "Are you always called all that?"

"No," said the maiden, still with the same distinctly-syllabled utterance, "I am generally called Nelly. But look now, you have talked."

"I never promised, you know," said Malcolm. "But, Nelly . . ."

"Oh! but you are not good," said Nelly, interrupting him. "I shall call Graciosa, or the Senhôra; my aunt, that is."

"Please don't," said Malcolm, energetically; "indeed I feel quite strong now. It will do me much more harm thinking and wondering about things, than if I talked for hours."

"I shall ask Graciosa," said his companion; "perhaps she may give leave. I only came to watch you for her while she was dining."

Nelly's errand was soon executed. She had expected to find Malcolm asleep again, but instead of this he was watching for her return with the utmost eagerness. In the exquisite repose of his present state, and his ignorance of the conditions under which it subsisted, he felt as our first parents may

have done in Paradise. And Nelly was his Raphael; a medium of identification with past and future.

Leave was given, it appeared, but for half-an-hour only. "And then Graciosa will come herself," said Nelly; "she knows no English, so you will be safe with her."

"Who is Graciosa?" asked Malcolm.

"One of my aunt's servants; she has lived here all her life. She was born on the estate."

"What estate, Nelly? What place am I in? How did I come here? Where is Andrew? Why did . . ."

Nelly strove, but unsuccessfully, to retain her gravity, and finally broke into a merry laugh.

"You must tell me which question to answer first," she interposed; "they come tumbling over each other like the waves over the Ponta yonder. It was through that you came here, you and André; Andrew, I mean."

"He is safe then, is he?" asked Malcolm, joyfully.



"Quite safe," said Nelly, "at least, until he left us; that was a few days since, the second week after you came here. He had hardly finished eating before that, poor boy!"

"And where is he gone?"

"On board one of the Fayal ships," said Nelly. "This island is Pico."

"Pico in the Azores?"

"Yes, that is the English name for them. Fayal is the next island to this, and such numbers of ships come there; it is the largest harbour anywhere in the world; ten, twenty, thirty, forty, sometimes fifty ships there all at once," said Nelly, reckoning up the decads on her fingers. "I have never been there myself, of course, but my uncle tells me."

"Who is your uncle, Nelly?"

"Senhôr Miguel de Cantara," said the maiden, whose speech was much expedited in the familiar Portuguese.

"Does he live here?"

"Of course he does," said Nelly, clapping her hands, "else how should I be here?"

Ah ! but I forgot," she continued, "you do not know. My father was English ; that is how I come to speak it."

"And you speak it exceedingly well too," said Malcolm.

"Do I ? Do I really ?" said Nelly, exceedingly gratified. "I was afraid I had lost it all since poor Mamma's death ; you see nobody here understands it, not even Fray Pedro, although he knows so much. I have taught my uncle a few words, but he is too busy always."

"How do you keep it up at all then ?" asked Malcolm.

"I go out on the beach," said Nelly, "and have such long English talks to myself ; out loud, you know ; something like a play, only doing all the people myself. But they are all ladies, that is the worst ; I don't know how gentlemen ought to talk. There are no gentlemen here, you see, except my uncle and Fray Pedro."

"Your father is not living, then ?"

"Oh ! no," said Nelly, shaking her head mournfully ; "he died when I was quite

small. He was a merchant in Terceira, and married Mamma there; my uncle was her eldest brother; then, when my father died, and Mamma had no money of her own, uncle Miguel brought us to live with him here."

"And you have lost your mother too?"

"Yes, she died two years ago. Uncle and aunt are very, very kind to me; but I do miss her so dreadfully," said Nelly, the young eyes brimming with tears.

"I know what that grief is too, Nelly," said Malcolm. "But tell me more about Andrew," he added, wishing to divert her thoughts. "Where is his ship bound for?"

"China, I believe," said Nelly, drying her eyes: "it will be there two or three years; it is an English ship, and he is steward's boy, the same as before. You were out of danger then, or he wouldn't have gone, although this was such a great chance for him; the vessel called here for limes, and we found they would be glad to have Andrew. I hope he will not be shipwrecked again, poor boy!"

"You know what happened to us then?" asked Malcolm.

"Oh! yes, Andrew was always telling us about it; always, I mean, when he was not eating," said Nelly, who seemed greatly impressed by Andrew's appetite; "he used to tell me in English, and then I turned it into Portuguese for the rest. But, Santo Antonio! how frightful it was! And how brave you were; how noble!"

"Not particularly, that I know of," said Malcolm; "at all events, we won't talk of that. Tell me what happened after I got ill; I have not the slightest notion."

"I don't see how you should have; Andrew said that was the worst time of the whole. He had been very much frightened before, as anybody would be: I could never have borne it, never have *borne* it," Nelly repeated in her emphatic English. "But it was almost worse, Andrew said, after they were all dead, and you lying on the raft there, hardly speaking. And when you did speak, it was nothing sensible."

"A fault of mine all my life, Nelly."

"Oh! please, I beg so many pardons. You know I don't say half what I mean."

"No, Nelly; so what you really did mean was that it was horribly absurd."

"No, no," said the maiden, clasping her hands in her eagerness of deprecation; "don't, please. I mean that . . ."

"All right, Nelly; I quite understood. I was delirious, no doubt. And what did Andrew do?"

"He could do nothing for the next day or two, except throw water over you, and watch the current. That was what brought you in here, great part of the way; the current, I mean. Then it died away, but Andrew had seen El Pico. . . ."

"Seen whom?"

"The Pico, our mountain here: it is tremendously high. And the wind had risen by that time, and Andrew got the sail up; you were no use."

"Never was, Nelly. Well, go on."

"The sail brought you in fast; fast; fast," said Nelly. "A great deal too fast, for it almost took you on to the Ponta; Andrew could not get it down again."

"The Ponta? ah! yes, you said it was through that we had come here."

"Not through the Ponta," said Nelly, laughing, "but through the waves upon it. The Ponta is . . . is . . . , not a peninsula; what is the other long word?"

"Promontory?"

"Yes, that is right; a great cliff running out into the sea. My uncle's estate here is Las Riveiras, and the ponta is called Las Riveiras too."

"And the waves break upon this, I suppose," said Malcolm.

"They don't break; there is a rock at the end lower than the rest, and they curl up over that and down the other side, clearing it so beautifully."

"Like a greyhound leaping a wall," said Malcolm. "No, the raft wouldn't have stood much chance there. How did we escape, Nelly?"

"I believe it was me," said Nelly so shyly that it would have been heartless to criticize her grammar. "I had gone down to look at



the waves, and saw the raft with Andrew upon it ; I couldn't see you ; then I ran up home, and some of uncle's men came down, and got our boat out. Only just in time ; you were close upon the rock when they took you off the raft. It was frightful to see it go over !" And Nelly put her hand to her eyes, as if to shut out the recollection.

" You saved our lives, dear Nelly," said Malcolm ; " thank you for it with all my heart. You must come and shew me the Ponta some day."

" It is close by here," said Nelly. " You will see it from your window ; when you are well enough to get up, that is."

" I intend to do that this afternoon," said Malcolm.

" Oh ! no, indeed no," remonstrated his companion ; " you must *not*. What would Fray Pedro say ?"

" Who is Fray Pedro, Nelly ?"

" The Padre ; the priest, that is, in our little village here. He is a great doctor, besides all the other things he knows, although he is so humble and quiet about

them ; he has been attending you all through the fever. We like him better than the regular doctor at Lagens."

"Lagens? Where is that?"

"About fifteen miles off, *such* a great town ; such streets and streets of houses, and such beautiful churches ! I was there once with uncle Miguel."

"You are a Roman Catholic, I suppose," said Malcolm.

"No, no," answered his companion, with great emphasis, "no indeed, I am Prot  stant, very Prot  stant. I go to mass and vespers always, and to benediction too, when it is fine ; and I always kneel to the blessed Sacrament," added Nelly, crossing herself. "But there are two or three things I shall not do."

"What are they?" asked Malcolm.

"Why, I shall not go to confession, never ; no never. Why should I confess to Fray Pedro ? He knows all about me, and I know all about him ; and I love him so dearly ! He has given up asking me to, now."



"But he lets you come to church," asked Malcolm.

"' Lets me come ?" He would be miserable if he didn't see me there, all the Sundays and festas. I suppose he ought not to allow it, properly ; the Lagens priests did say something about it, I believe ; they are always making mischief. But the Padre doesn't mind. The people here would pelt any one who insulted him."

"Your uncle is Roman Catholic, I suppose ?"

"Yes, he and aunt both ; and so was Mamma. But my father was not. He was of your church, Church of England, and my mother promised I should not give it up ; he didn't mind my going to mass, for he went there himself, but I was never to become a Roman Catholic. And I shall not," added Nelly, decidedly ; "not even for Fray Pedro."

"But you join in the prayers to the Virgin ?" asked Malcolm. "That is not exactly a Protestant usage, or Church of England either."

"No," said Nelly, colouring as she recognized her own mispronunciation, but too eager to refer to it. "No, that is one of the things I shall not do. It is not right; Santo Antonio, no!"

"You seem to think a good deal of Santo Antonio," said Malcolm.

His companion coloured again; this time, in a semi-consciousness of some infirmity, not of speech but of logical position.

"He is the Patrao; the patron-saint," that is, she said, apologetically; "his festa is our great day here; and it is so happy always. And then there are the underground voices."

"What are they?"

"It is hardly safe to talk about, even here," said Nelly; "*they* make them."

"They? who?"

"The spirits," Nelly answered under her breath; "bad spirits, of course. They have been seen sometimes, and very often indeed people hear them."

"What do they hear?" asked Malcolm.

"The most dreadful things; groaning and

hooting, and dragging chains about. When they get very bad, the church-bells are rung, and there is a procession of Santo Antonio. Oh! Graciosa, it never can be the half-hour !”

“ Half-hour !” exclaimed Graciosa, who had just entered, “ why, it is nearly two hours. I guessed you would like your English talk with the young senhôr, and I don’t suppose much harm has happened ; but I shall allow no more ; not one syllable.”

Graciosa’s indulgence had probably served her own purposes as well ; but she was peremptory now, and Nelly was fain to depart. Malcolm sank back upon the pillow, and again slept soundly.

## CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning, Fray Pedro paid an early visit to Villa Nuova, as the Senhôr's house was called, Las Riveiras being the name of the estate generally. The bulletin was satisfactory, and he authorized his patient's moving for the day into a small sitting-room adjoining; he had some cottagers to see, and would return when Malcolm was dressed.

Dressing was a slow process, but Malcolm got through it, and walked into the sitting-room without help; there he established himself on a sofa fronting the open window.

An exquisite change for an invalid!

Prominent in the landscape was Nelly's El Pico, a volcanic cone of seven thousand

feet, clothed with vegetation to half its height, although sterile above. In the distance the country undulated, open pastures alternating with ridges of crag and wood. Nearer home the eye rested on the cleared lands of Las Riveiras, above which rose the campanile of the village church. On the sea side, a stream skirted the hill on which Villa Nuova stood, and formed a natural haven at its foot, the jutting rock of the Ponta closing the view beyond.

No English scene, unquestionably. Orange woods clustering with gold, trellissed vines with the Indian corn high beneath them, cottages built and roofed with lava, all bespoke an altered region, no less than the mellow light and matchless climate which won the Azores their earlier name of the "Fortunate Isles." No English scene; and yet something in it recalled home. Recalled Malcolm's past; boyhood and youth, followed by the incidents of later date. Above all, recalled Evelyn.

What a cruel bar was this which divided them; how intolerable was existence with-

out her! Must he not write, notwithstanding her prohibition; assure her of his life, his safety? Small likelihood, indeed, that the news of the disaster to the Castle-reagh would ever reach her; but it would form the excuse for, at all events, one letter.

Pen and paper were not at hand, or Malcolm could hardly have resisted the impulse. But he soon discarded it. Most unfair to Evelyn would his writing now be; an ungenerous return indeed for the anxiety she had shewn that he should be in no way compromised! No, let him bear his burden, heavy as it was, by himself.

His thoughts were thus busied, when steps ascended the stairs to his room, followed by a timid knock. Nelly most likely. She had disappeared since the day before, and he would have welcomed her with extreme satisfaction.

But it was not Nelly. The person who entered was a little man, very frightened and very poorly dressed, but with a pleasant smile and bright eye which threw all shortcomings into the back-ground.

The visitor stammered some words in his own language; Fray Pedro the priest, as Malcolm readily divined him to be, was a far less resolute person than Fray Pedro the doctor! But when his patient attempted to place a chair for him, the medical instincts rallied forthwith; Malcolm was held back on the sofa by main force. His tongue was free however.

"Thank you for your great kindness," he began: "I only learnt it yesterday, but I have been impatient to see you ever since. Thank you with all my heart."

The Padre bowed courteously, but shook his head. "Latinè potes?" he asked.

"Non . . . multum," said Malcolm, who, although he could have despatched a page of Cicero, had never attempted dialogue, and found the words flying from him. "In fact, extr . . . I mean, admodum parvum."

"Neque ego Anglicè," said the Padre; "interprete opus est. Ere-merinda! Nellee!"

The Padre moved to the open casement as he spoke; Nelly, as he knew, was gardening

at no great distance. She bounded upstairs, radiant with delight, and at once established herself as medium.

"Tell your guest that he is much better to-day," said the Padre, in Portuguese.

"Tell the Padre, please," said Malcolm, when this was translated to him, "that I have no doubt of the fact, but that it is entirely due to his care and skill. Tell him, please, that I am most grateful for both."

"Yes," said Nelly. "But you must not go on saying, 'Tell him, please,' each of you; there will be no end to it. You must talk as if you were both deaf, and I was a speaking trumpet."

"All right," said Malcolm. So the dialogue proceeded accordingly; Nelly's English renderings of the Padre contrasting pleasantly, in their deliberate utterance, with the voluble Portuguese in which Malcolm was reproduced. At times Nelly interposed, in one tongue or the other, with comments of her own.

"I must go into Fayal to-morrow and find something to do," said Malcolm, when



preliminaries were dispatched ; " as soon as I have taken leave of Senhôr Miguel and your aunt, that is, Nelly. Are they at home ?"

" My aunt is, and is coming to see you this afternoon ; uncle is away for a few days. But I am sure they will not let you go."

" I am quite sure that *I* shall not," said the Padre, energetically. " You don't think of walking to the next island, I suppose ?"

" Not exactly," said Malcolm.

" Then," said the Padre, " I shall take care you have no boat. Santo José, no. Would you bring on the fever again ?"

" Then I must try for some employment at Lagens," said Malcolm. " I can get there on my own feet."

" Lagens ? Who told you of that ?"

" Nelly did," answered Malcolm. " She says it is a very fine town indeed."

" Nelly has young eyes. Little enough doing in Lagens ; half-a-dozen provision-shops, and a score or two of shaven crowns like myself to fatten upon them."

" *You* don't grow very fat, Padre," said

Nelly. "And why do you cut your hair like that? You would be quite good-looking if you let it grow."

"And the whiskers too, I suppose," said Fray Pedro; "like an English bishop I saw in Lisbon once. Such a bushy pair! And such a climber as he was, always going to the top of everything, higher than any one else had been; I suppose it's a way your people have of getting to Heaven. But he was a handsome man; and the bishopess was a handsome woman."

"For shame, Padre!" said Nelly. "You know that you would be much happier if you were married."

"No, I should not be, Ere-merinda, for then you would not come and garden for me, and see that Aldouza is not burning the dinner to cinders. But, my child, ask him, please, . . ."

"No, Padre; ask him yourself. You are forgetting."

"Why should you leave us so soon, even if you were strong enough?" asked the Padre, addressing Malcolm as directed.

"I do not like trespassing on such kind hosts a day longer than I am compelled," said Malcolm.

"They would think it no trespass if you remained a year; we do not see too many strangers here. Forgive my asking;—were you going on business when the ship was lost?"

"Not business," answered Malcolm; "I was going as a settler to the colony. But that is all over now."

"Why so?"

"Why, because it is useless without money, and mine is at the bottom of the sea, worse luck. I am simply a beggar. That makes me still more anxious not to trespass here."

The Padre reflected for a minute. "Poor boy, poor boy!" he said, half aloud; "I wonder whether . . . whether . . . I can sound the Senhôr about it at all events." Then he addressed Malcolm again.

"Supposing you got to Fayal, what would you do?"

"I hardly know yet," said Malcolm;

"work my passage out, most likely, and get employment on some farm ; drive stock, instead of owning it."

"You are used to farming?"

"Not in the least," said Malcolm.

"What have you done in England?"

"Nothing very profitable. I was at the university, but family troubles came, and I had to leave it. I have been teaching, in a small way, since that."

"You understand figures ; arithmetic?"

"Oh ! yes."

"And you could keep accounts?"

"I suppose I could if I tried."

"Ah !" said the Padre, with a long inspiration. "Have you no one in England to return to, now this has happened ? no father, . . . or mother ?" he added, very gently.

"No one," said Malcolm.

"Poor boy !" Then the Padre turned the conversation.

"You seemed to be enjoying the view from your window ?" he said.

"It is beautiful," said Malcolm ; "that

El Pico is grand. It is not active, I suppose?"

"Not at present," said the Padre. "Centuries ago it must have been busy enough; the island is half covered with lava, and very useful it is to us."

"How so?"

"We build with it as you see, and plant the orange trees in it; they grow better there than anywhere."

"Grow in the lava?"

"No, no," said the Padre; "you dig through to the soil underneath, then the lava keeps the roots moist; they would burn up without it. But El Pico may begin again some day; he makes strange noises at times."

"So Nelly tells me," said Malcolm. "Only it is not the mountain itself; there is an underground population, 'vasto Cyclopes in antro,' " he added, anxious to retrieve his credit for Latinity.

"Ah! we will not talk of that," said the Padre, who had lived too long in the island not to share its superstitions. "As to Emerinda, I am glad she believes anything;

she is an arch-heretic. If I did my duty . . .”

“You would send me to the Inquisition, I suppose,” said Nelly. “No, Padre, you know you wouldn’t. And, if you did, and they made a bonfire of me, you would put it out, or jump in yourself.”

“Nescio an verè dicas,” said the Padre, half audibly; “*perturbata est fides ipsa propter puellam. Verùm quid faciam? Filiolæ loco habeo; illa me ut patrem.*”

And with this confession, he rose to take his leave.

But Malcolm had a question to put on his own account. He would have preferred a Latin dress for this also, but Nelly again proved indispensable.

“I want you to ask the Padre something,” he said, hesitatingly.

“Oh! yes,” said Nelly. “Padre, come back please. What is it?”

“Ask,” said Malcolm, “whether he would mind my coming up to mass the first morning I can. I should like to do it after . . . after what has happened.”

Nelly put the question, and the Padre returned into the room, a good deal embarrassed.

"You are not a Catholic?" he asked.

"Not, I fear, what you would call such."

"Against rules, against rules; I burden my conscience sorely; already I owe penances for this other child. But I cannot turn away God's worshipper. Come then, my son," he added, addressing Malcolm; "if there be error, it shall lie at my door. For yourself, if you come in love and humility, doubt not of acceptance, even though you believe not altogether as we do. Pax vobiscum."

And therewith the Padre made his escape, looking, and feeling, exceedingly ashamed of the part he had just been acting.

## CHAPTER VI.

Two days later Don Miguel returned, and the Padre put in effect a plan to which his questions to Malcolm had tended. This was as follows.

The Senhôr's property lay a good deal scattered, portions of it twenty or thirty miles from the house; and the produce was equally varied. Wine and oranges formed the staple; then there were wheat and Indian corn; pomegranates, limes, and figs; a large live stock, and plantations of the mahogany wood of the island.

If the estates were valuable, the management was laborious in the same proportion; the Senhôr himself attended to the actual cultivation, but the accounts were kept by a paid clerk. And this post, a vacant one at present, the Padre had des-



tined for Malcolm. His ignorance of Portuguese was some difficulty ; but then the exports had not begun yet, and there would be two or three months to learn it. " And Ere-merinda could teach him in that time ; quite easily ! "

So when Don Miguel returned, the matter was talked over ; the *Senhõra* approved ; and eventually Malcolm was offered, and accepted, the accountantship at Las Riveiras. He was to reside in the house, and be one of the family in all respects.

A few days completed Malcolm's convalescence, and then the Portuguese lessons began. Fray Pedro had forbidden them earlier, but even he was compelled to admit that his patient was now emancipated.

One morning, Nelly found herself in the cool western verandah of Villa Nuova, with her table and work-basket before her ; an open grammar beside the basket ; flanking this, dictionary, exercise book, and inkstand, arranged with extreme precision. On the

opposite side—the pupil ; reclining at present in an easy chair.

“I suppose I ought to stand up and put my hands behind me,” said Malcolm.

“No ; but you must be good, please. What are the parts of speech?”

“I hav’n’t the faintest notion,” said Malcolm ; “you might as well ask me the Roman consuls. Besides, I must learn the alphabet first, must I not?”

“Yes, of course,” answered Nelly ; “how stupid I am. Here are the letters ; I will say them first in Portuguese, and then you repeat them after me.”

“Wouldn’t it do if you said some words, Nelly,” asked Malcolm ; “we shall get on quicker. There are plenty of ‘z’s in Portuguese ; I have noticed that already, and the other letters are safe to come. Suppose now you begin with . . .”

“Begin with what?” interrupted Nelly, who was much too delighted with the employment to keep order very long.

“Well, with that long name of yours, which frightened me so much the other day.”

"Oh! it didn't really frighten you?" asked Nelly, in her measured English.

"Took my breath away, that was all; I have hardly recovered it yet. How does it go? I know the first long word, "Eremerinda," from hearing the Padre say it. "Isn't he a brick, by the way?"

"Yes, I suppose so; that is, I do not exactly know," said Nelly, doubtingly.

"Of course you don't," said Malcolm; "how should you? it was my fault for talking slang. Slang, Nelly, means . . . means, what does it mean? I really never thought before. I think it's like this," said Malcolm, musing. "When a lot of fellows get together, as we did at Cambridge or at school before that, you can't always say what you really think."

"Can't you?"

"Well, no. About facts you can; a lie is a lie. But if it is something that you care about very much yourself, you can't tell the whole parish; you try and keep it out of sight. Don't *you*?"

"Ye-es," said Nelly, still doubtingly.

"At all events, you will before long," said Malcolm, "and slang helps this. If you say a thing is 'awfully jolly,' no one minds; but if you say it's intensely beautiful, those who can't admire anything think you are shamming, and those who can, hate you for laying down the law to them. Why were you called Ere-merinda, Nelly?"

"It was grandmamma's name, mamma's mother, that is; it has been in the family for the last hundred years. Do you know who we are descended from; uncle Miguel and myself, I mean?"

"Not the least, Nelly, except Adam."

"Why from Pombal!" said Nelly, triumphantly.

"He was a great man, indeed," said Malcolm, whose knowledge of the Portuguese minister was far too precarious to be trusted out of generalities. "But was he called Ere-merinda?"

"No, of course not; it is a woman's name."

"One of your names is a man's, so I thought Pombal might have been christened

on the same principles. You are called Santo . . . what was it?"

"Santo Josè, you mean? He is not a man, he is a saint," said Nelly, crossing herself; "my birthday saint. I was born on his day, that is."

"Yes, I quite understand. And Eleanor?"

"My father had me called that, I believe."

"Most likely," said Malcolm. "Was he English born?"

"Oh! yes. I have an aunt living there still; at los Devizes, if there is such a place."

"Certainly, only we do not tack on a 'los' before it. Oh! I have forgotten, though; there was another mouthful before Santo Josè."

Maria Govia Figariada," answered Nelly; "they come together. They were mamma's names."

"I am so sorry, Nelly," said Malcolm, gently; "I did not think of that."

"But I love to talk of her," said Nelly, "she was so beautiful and kind, and so patient with me. She taught me everything

herself, at least all the little I do know, and it must have been such trouble: I am so stupid about everything; sums, particularly. I often try them now, but they will *not* come right."

"How far have you got?"

"Only to rule of three," said Nelly: "I am trying with one of papa's books, but it's no use; I can never make out whether those figures over are farthings or ells of cloth. I do cry over them so."

"Don't do that," said Malcolm with a glance at the speaker's eyes, into which this record of sorrows had fetched some light drops; "I can help you with the sums at all events. By the way, Nelly, I wonder if . . ."

"If what?"

"If you can ride? There seem plenty of horses about here."

"No," said Nelly, mournfully; "there is no one to teach me."

"That is soon settled then," said Malcolm. "Let me see; yes, that little chestnut will be just the thing for you."

"Oh! Mr. Rayner;" exclaimed Nelly, "do you mean that you will really teach me riding? How delicious! Will you really, really?"

"On condition you do not call me Mr. Rayner any more. You make me feel as old as Pombal."

"I know what your other name is," said Nelly, shyly. "But I could never call you that."

"Couldn't pronounce it? Or couldn't what?"

Nelly made no answer.

"Try the pronouncing first," said Malcolm.

Nelly made some demonstration with her lips, but no sound came.

"Say it after me then. 'Malcolm.'"

"More-come," whispered Nelly, blushing from cheek to forehead.

"That's all right then. Now the only thing is a side-saddle; I will see about that this afternoon. You must begin with short distances; then, in a week or two, you will be able to come with me anywhere."

"Ye-es," said Nelly. "I suppose so."

"Why not?"

"No reason at all that I know of," said Nelly, laughing; "in fact, I intend to go, if you will take me. But you have no idea how strange the Portuguese are; even children, as I am, have to wear veils very often: Aunt Alfonza said something to me about it the other day! As to girls riding anywhere, or walking anywhere, the people would think an earthquake was coming. But I am 'Engleesh,' not Portuguese, so I do as I like."

"What does your uncle say," asked Malcolm.

"The same that I do, and so does Fray Pedro; they both understand things; it is only aunt who troubles me. She is a good creature, and loves me dearly; but she is . . . *Portuguese*," repeated Nelly, with great contempt. "Who would ever suppose we had a piano-forte."

"I saw one in the drawing-room," said Malcolm, "but it is covered up, and I thought no one played."



"We all play, and sing too. Aunt has a divine voice, and uncle Miguel sings with her; such a tenor! But the piano has not been touched for two years."

"Why not?"

"It is a kind of family vault," said Nelly. "There are seven islands here all full of aunt's relations, besides others in Portugal; and whenever any of them die there must be no music for six months. The cover was just off in February and the Fayal tuner coming, when somebody lost a baby somewhere."

"It *was* hard," said Malcolm. "But, Nelly, I heard you singing in the shrubbery last evening."

"Not me, it was a bird. It is curious that aunt Alfonza makes the same mistake sometimes."

"It was a very sweet bird," said Malcolm. "When we go for our rides, out of hearing of the Portuguese, the bird must sing to me. It is a long time since any one did that." And a pang shot through Malcolm's heart as he thought of the last song he had heard in England.

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"You have no sisters?" asked Nelly.

"No, nor brother either; I am quite alone in the world. You must be my little sister here, Nelly. And I intend to keep you in order, mind; you will find me a thorough tyrant, especially about the riding. I can't bear to see a girl awkward or timid on horseback."

"But I must be frightened a little at first," pleaded Nelly; "you have no idea what a coward I am! Only think, although I am so old now, past fourteen, I am so afraid of being alone in the dark. Often, when Graciosa takes away my candle at night I lie awake crying like a baby."

"That I can't help you in," said Malcolm, "you will grow out of it I suppose. What are you afraid of; the snakes?"

"Snakes!" echoed Nelly; "there are none of them in Pico; nothing to hurt anybody except the cows now and then. What I am most frightened at is Doña Francesca's hand."

"Who is Doña Francesca?"

"She used to live in this house," said

Nelly in a low voice ; " before my grandfather rebuilt it, that is."

" But she must be dead and buried ages ago. Why are you afraid of her?"

" Her hand was never buried," said Nelly, in tones still more awe-stricken.

" Why not?"

" It could never be found," answered Nelly. " She wore beautiful rings upon it, and the night she died some wicked people cut it off, and stole them I suppose."

" Like Lady Mount-Edgecombe," said Malcolm, " only the wicked people didn't get *her* property; she came to life again. But what harm does the hand do you?"

" It comes into the rooms at night," said Nelly, " feeling about everywhere. I often hear it."

" Where?"

" On the dressing-table mostly. There are no rings there, for I have none, but it tries to find them all the same, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards."

" I wonder if you have such a thing as a mouse-trap?"

Nelly fixed her eyes on the speaker with an expression in which incredulity, anger, and, finally, some degree of shame, struggled for the mastery. "Oh! you don't mean . . ." she exclaimed.

"Yes, I do," said Malcolm: "there are mice in Pico, I suppose, if there is nothing else. Set your trap to-night, Nelly, at all events: if it is the hand, we shall catch that; and if it is a mouse we shall catch that instead. But don't forget the cheese, mind."

For another half minute Nelly still remained unconvinced; then she broke into one of her merriest laughs. "How foolish you must think me," she said. "But I will try and cure myself; I will; I will not put the mouse-trap, and I will never think any more about the hand; never, never. Oh! but, how very not good you are; there is twelve o'clock striking, and you have not done one word of Portuguese yet!"

Half-an-hour's work was eventually achieved under this pressure.

Then, after the early dinner of the family,

Nelly's first ride was organized :—a strict discipline, as Malcolm had threatened, the fingers mercilessly tapped whenever they sought aid from the pummel.

Then, while Malcolm bathed, Nelly piled a basket from the Phæacian yield of the Villa Nuova gardens, and carried it down to the boating-house, and there was a sail round the Ponta. Round the Ponta, and a long way the other side of it ; the sun dipping before they returned, and Nelly's pile of fruit having vanished still earlier.

Then, in the exquisite twilight, fragrant with flowers and musical with the song of birds, the new companions retraced their steps to the Villa—The first day of the "Portuguese lessons" was over !

And as this day had passed, so passed very many which followed it. The verandah ; Nelly's table with its work and books ; the talking and teaching. The rides, in which tutor and pupil reversed their positions. The bathing for Malcolm, and boating for both afterwards. The fairest of scenes and the brightest of

summer weather, all day and every day. It was unspeakably pleasant !

By and by, indeed, Malcolm's duties began. The season advanced, the crops were got in, and the holiday life was in abeyance for a time. The "accountant" had his hands full.

But this too was pleasant enough. Malcolm soon got into his work, and did it well. Senhôr Miguel expressed approval; the Padre congratulated himself on his own discernment. And Nelly was better pleased than anybody; her ears tingled with satisfaction at Malcolm's praises. Had she not been his preceptress ?

Then this too came to an end; for the present year, at all events. The last consignments were shipped; the books balanced; office-work subsided into its normal channels. A leisure time for Malcolm once more. It had seemed to Nelly as if it was never coming. But it did come.

Indoors leisure now, for the most part.

Even in the Azores, it is not always sunshine. The weather broke up: the days

shortened ; and a ride now and then,—Nelly had become a promising horsewoman by this time,—was all that could be attempted.

But the indoors occupations made up for this ; Nelly discovered, to her surprise, that the winter was full of enjoyment ! To his elder hosts, Malcolm made himself as agreeable as circumstances permitted ; but the opportunities were not many ; the Senhôr was often absent, and the Senhôra seemed to be eternally opening and folding dresses in her own room. Excepting with Nelly, there was little enough to be done all day.

But with Nelly there was a great deal, and Malcolm undertook it with a good will. She had been taught next to nothing ; the little she did know had been gleaned by herself at hap-hazard. Malcolm now, by a kind of tacit understanding on both sides, assumed the reins of authority.

The most patient of tutors. The most docile of all pupils !

The refractory sums were first mastered. Nelly was quick enough, and would sooner have drowned herself than go wrong through

carelessness ; and if, in human frailty, mishaps did occur and tears followed, they were forgotten in the ecstasy of the next success. The progress of Malcolm's eye down the slate was watched with an anxiety which blanched the cheek and kept the breath suspended. Then at the words, "All right, Nelly," cheek and brow flushed with joy ; life became Elysian !

And ciphering by no means exhausted the tutor's work. Nelly learnt Latin. Nelly learnt chess. Nelly was set to read histories, write essays, make analyses. Usually too, when the day's lessons were over, she took her work and Malcolm read to her ; a reward for diligence. Read poetry, very often ; fiction, still oftener ; Mr. Arbuthnot's library comprised a fair allowance of both. Some of the novels Nelly already knew. But very pleasant now that *he* should be there to share the interest ; laugh at her, when her chest heaved with its excitement ; pretend, at the most agonizing moment, to close the book for the day ! Even the Padre was not company like that !



And so the winter passed away. Passed away, and brought back spring and summer once more ; weeks and months gliding by so pleasantly, so uneventfully, that they seemed but so many days.

Still seemed so, when they had in fact run on into years ; winter and summer, winter and summer over again. Making, at last, the total of three years.

Bringing little change of any kind to Malcolm Rayner ; but fruitful of it to the now lovely girl who continued to share every pursuit with him. Marring no trait of character ; leaving untouched the rare guilelessness of heart and soul. But still, converting the childhood of their first acquaintance, those three years before, into the dawning womanhood of seventeen !

We must, however, quit the Fortunate Isles for the present, and see how it is faring with others at the end of the same period. Already the threads of our tale run together ; actions the most disconnected and remote are weaving themselves into its final result.

## CHAPTER VII.

“PRESSURE was to be put upon Paulina;” such had been Mr. Witherby’s decision when we last parted from him; and from what has been said elsewhere the reader will gather that the “pressure” had been applied. At the commencement of the three years Paulina had been on the point of starting for the Continent; she had not done so, and now, at its close, was still in England. With the very cogent reasons for this Mr. Witherby was acquainted;—and no one else was.

We must not detail what had taken place, at any length; it would interrupt the narrative, and our concern is less with the transactions themselves than with the consequences to which they led.

On the day following his discovery of the important document which he held, Mr. Witherby drove over to Stanton Court, and apprised Paulina of its contents. For a minute or two,—stealthily but steadily watched,—she had the paper in her own hands and satisfied herself that the writing was Philip Rayner's; then it was gently taken from her and replaced in Mr. Witherby's pocket-book. His cue was that he should not propose any terms to Paulina; the proposition must come from herself, and Mr. Witherby be the tempted party; he waited for her to speak accordingly.

"What did he mean?" Paulina asked, as soon as her consternation permitted. "A scrap of writing like that had annulled the whole settlement? left her nothing; absolutely nothing?"

Mr Witherby feared this was the case, beyond any doubt. It was most unfortunate, but there was no help for it.

But what . . . what did he intend to do?

Mr. Witherby could not say at present; he must think it over. His first duty had

been to prevent his client involving herself any further; the mesne rents, the timber, everything since her husband's death she was already responsible for. Then he rose to take his leave.

Not with any special haste; he lingered in the hall, giving some business messages for the steward; if Paulina chose to make overtures now, she should have the opportunity. But most likely she would be too confounded by his news to do this; he might have to wait for the result. Possibly to wait this day; possibly one or two more.

But the delay was of shorter duration; Paulina had grasped the position even thus early. Mr. Witherby had hardly seated himself in his carriage when the drawing-room bell rung; in the next minute, the footman was on the gravel sweep outside, calling to the driver to stop. "Mrs. Rayner had forgotten something; would Mr. Witherby kindly come back?"

A protracted interview, this time.

Paulina found great difficulty in approaching her point, and he played with her for some time ; then, when it had gone on long enough, drew in the line, suddenly and sharply. "Excuse my mentioning it, Mrs. Rayner, but I have some pressing business for this afternoon. Your servant said you had forgotten something : will you oblige me by saying what it is?"

Paulina was silent for a minute. "About this . . . this unfortunate paper?" she asked at last.

"Yes?"

"Need there . . . Need you do anything about it?"

"Do you mean that I should suppress a legal document of this importance?"

Paulina was again silent.

"That was your meaning then?"

"Yes," said Paulina, timidly. "It is very hard upon me."

"It *is* hard," said her companion ; "I feel for you, unquestionably. You have gone through a great deal ; committed yourself to a great deal ; it seems cruel that you should

be deprived of the results. But this is not a question of mere feeling; there is serious risk in it."

"It might never be found out," Paulina urged.

"I cannot say," replied Mr. Witherby. "Besides, there is another view of the case. I have been hitherto an honest man, although possibly, as I told you when I undertook your Chancery business, not so punctilious as some others. But this would be a very different matter. You are proposing a fraud; a deliberate legal fraud."

"I have been cruelly used," Paulina repeated.

"I think so; but still that does not alter the case. Every sixpence of the rents you receive henceforth: every sixpence of the money you are about to raise by mortgage, will be wrongfully obtained. You will be committing a felony; and I, if I accede to your wish, shall be abetting you in it. That is really what it comes to."

The words, although outspoken enough, were kindly uttered as far as tone went;

expressed sympathy. And Paulina had great need of sympathy just at present. Strangely enough, with all her falseness, there were gleams of a different nature beneath it. Jostled against each other, side by side, alternating with the abruptness of the most vivid contrasts, lie the strata of human thought; witnesses of an antecedent great evil, the dislocation of that which was once reciprocal and harmonious. Paulina was softened, and answered with her woman's cry for help.

"Mr. Witherby," she said, "you will not desert me in this? You have been a kind friend to me hitherto, the only friend I have; alone here in a strange country, a strange home. I know that I have done evil; I do not pretend to repent of it, not at present; but I was sorely tempted. And this is such a little matter more! You *will* help me, will you not?"

Mr. Witherby was entirely disposed to help. Not as some men might have been, from the pleading of the beautiful face before him, enhancing its beauty now by genuine

emotion; he took cognizance of this, as he did of other facts, but it had nothing to do with his reply. His programme was laid out to the letter; and what had just occurred was, more or less, part of it.

"It is a serious matter," he again said, with an affectation of nervousness. "I do not altogether refuse; I feel for you; but I must consider of it."

And then Mr. Witherby once more took his leave. A *bonâ fide* departure this time.

On the following day he again drove over to Stanton Court. Paulina met him with undisguised anxiety: she had passed a wholly sleepless night. Life itself seemed to hang upon his decision.

And now, when the decision came, it was adverse; an unqualified refusal!

Paulina started from her seat, in utter dismay. "How . . . why . . . what did he mean? Would he not help her?"



No, Mr. Witherby would not. He spoke to her rather stiffly this morning; persisted in his refusal, but without, at first, stating any reasons for it.

Paulina's distress became excessive. She lost all self-command; sobbed, almost threw herself at his feet. Then, at length, Mr. Witherby began to shew his hand.

"Mrs. Rayner," he said, "I am compelled to consider myself. As I told you yesterday, the risk would be serious; but, besides this, there is another view of the case; the secret is a valuable one. Young Mr. Rayner would pay handsomely for it, and with no professional sacrifice on my part; with management, it would be worth at least fifty thousand pounds to me. I am too poor a man to forego this."

Paulina saw her chance, and caught eagerly at it.

"I could compensate you also," she said.

"Impossible, Mrs. Rayner. You have no resources of any kind."

"There is the life income," said Paulina, "eleven thousand a year. Even deducting

the two thousand which I pay for the mortgage interest and premiums, this leaves nine thousand clear."

Mr. Witherby looked at her steadily, but for a minute or two without speaking.

"Do you mean that you would be prepared to surrender that?" he asked at length.

"Part of it," Paulina answered.

"It must be a considerable part in a case like this; you would have to tax yourself pretty heavily. Are you prepared to do so?"

"Yes."

"You are right," said Mr. Witherby. "Your alternative is beggary; arrest; imprisonment; utter ruin. You are quite right."

He rose from his seat, and walked up and down the room for some time.

"There is a further point to be considered," he said at last; "how is this payment to be insured? There must be a guarantee for it."

"What guarantee?"

"You must remain in England. Are you disposed to do this also?"

"If you insist upon it," said Paulina, nervously. The time of her subjugation had come now; this was the first link riveted upon her. She cowered helplessly before her master!

"I must, of course, do that, or anything else which you require," she continued.

"But why is this necessary?"

"For obvious reasons," said Mr. Witherby. "You see, no money passes through my hands; Peters, the steward, receives it all and pays it in to your banker. I have no control over it."

"But you might dismiss Peters; collect the rents instead of him."

"That would not do, Mrs. Rayner; if I accede to your proposal, there must not be the vestige of an account between us. What I receive must be simply a present from yourself, paid by your own hands into mine. And, for that purpose, you must be where I can reach you."

"Let it be so then."

Mr. Witherby made no reply, but again paced the room, apparently in thought as before. Then he seated himself near Paulina.

"I have decided, Mrs. Rayner," he said. "Your secret shall be kept, if you wish it, and I will tell you the exact terms. Your net income from the property is, as you say, deducting interest and premiums, nine thousand a year."

"Yes," said Paulina.

"Very well. Once in every quarter, a few days after Peters has made his payment, you shall hand over to me fifteen hundred pounds. The rest you can keep for yourself."

"Fifteen hundred pounds!" exclaimed Paulina, aghast: "once in every quarter! Six thousand a year! They are very hard conditions!"

"Not so very hard," said Mr. Witherby, "considering it is the choice between that and nothing; you would still have three thousand free. However," he added, rising, as Paulina still hesitated, "I have no desire

to press you. These are the terms, and if you like to accept them, you can; for my own interest, it would be better that you should not. Let things take their course. Good morning."

"Stay, stay, Mr. Witherby," exclaimed Paulina, in the utmost agitation; "I did not intend to refuse; it was only the amount which staggered me at first. But I do not see how, with that reduced income, I could remain at Stanton Court."

"But you have no wish to do so, have you?"

"Certainly not," Paulina answered.

"So I thought; nor is that any part of the stipulation; it would be a most needless expense. London, Brighton, St. Leonard's, where you will; only in England, and where you will be reasonably accessible; at the moment you cease to be so, our bargain will terminate also. And now, Mrs. Rayner, do we understand each other?"

"Quite," said Paulina. And the interview came to a close.

A few weeks later, the establishment at Stanton Court was broken up; a gardener and his wife left in possession of the house which had witnessed such lavish hospitality; the old Rayner stock exiled and outcast; the wrong still, in some sort, triumphant.—Would the right ever resume its place?

Paulina herself adopted one of Mr. Witherby's suggestions, and became the lessee of a house at Brighton, which she thenceforth made her residence. It was not what she had pictured in the day-dreams of a few months before; still, it was well enough. Three thousand a year, with a handsome house on the Steyne, were not to be disparaged; better, at all events, than the recent mortifications of Stanton Court. At Brighton, society was at Paulina's own command; she had a certain amount of following; was admired, as her beauty deserved she should be; entertained, and was entertained in turn.

Thus far accordingly, thus good.

But this tranquillity was not to last; and the disturbing cause came, not from the

victim of Mr. Witherby's plots, but from the plotter himself. *He became dissatisfied with his plunder.* This six thousand a year which at first had seemed such wealth to him, of what real use was it?

"It had made him, added to his now large professional earnings, the first man in Caversham." Yes, quite true. He had obtained all, and ten times more, than he had ever dared to hope for; was admired, courted, envied on all sides; there was nothing in the sphere of his present surroundings which he might not aspire to; very little which he had not in fact realized. Quite true all this. And for the first two years of these three he had basked in this new sunshine accordingly.

But then came a change. A further craving supervened. Mr. Witherby's eyes were opened, and the objects he had hitherto set such store by turned in his hands to a fool's bauble!

What did he really care for starrng it in a provincial town like Caversham? His ambition soared far higher. He wanted to

be the capitalist, somebody of note everywhere; substantially, quotably rich; that was the real goal of his aspirations! He had not been conscious of it before; it had been complicated with these minor aims; but he yielded himself, soul and body, to it now. Rich, in this enlarged sense of the term, he must be; and would be.

But how?

Not so very difficult to discover the means. The Rayner connection had brought other clients; lucrative business, and often on a scale of importance; the "family conveyancing," for which he had hungered in old times. Mr. Witherby did his work well; and he became known, and employed, accordingly.

And the employment meant two things. It meant the legitimate profits which, with Paulina's payments, supported his position at Caversham. And it meant very often, a considerable amount of client's money lying idle at his own banker's. Why should not Mr. Witherby utilise this?



It was the very thing he wanted! One thing, in these days, would build up a man's fortune, and one only; that was, speculation. Mr. Witherby had nothing of his own to speculate with, but he had these available funds at most times. What was easier than to put them into the market, traffic with them at a safe profit; when this was realized, replace the original amount, and—pocket the difference? Who would be the worse off? Who would be the wiser?

And Mr. Witherby speculated accordingly.

At first with the happiest results: it seems idiopathic to gambling that it should be so. At the end of these three years he was worth thirty thousand pounds and upwards. But then came the reverse.

Consols, and other securities with them, had been steadily rising, and according to all "Exchange" forecasts, were bound to rise still higher; Mr. Witherby was, in the course of his transactions, committed to their doing so. But what they in fact did was to fall. Some ominous intelligence was telegraphed

from the continent, and the fall was rapid and decisive. Had the rise continued, Mr. Witherby's thirty thousand would have neared fifty. The fall simply reversed the position; swept the thirty into chaos, and left him with twenty thousand, or thereabouts, of liability.

Liability, of course, to make good the funds which he had borrowed. One clients' money it was in this case, the trustee of an estate in East Kent. Outlying portions of this had been sold, and the proceeds lodged with Mr. Witherby's banker, awaiting a re-investment in land nearer home; the purchase would have been completed ere now, but difficulties had arisen on the title, and caused delay. Two or three weeks, probably, would remove these, and the money would then have to be paid over.

What was Mr. Witherby to do? Where was he to get the twenty thousand?

Neither from his professional earnings, nor from Paulina's payments, had he saved a sixpence: his expenses had kept pace with them. And his wife's small property was

in the hands of trustees. There was one resource only, and that was—Paulina herself once more. The twenty thousand pounds must be extracted from *her*; raised on her life interest and policies, as her own twenty thousand had been three years previously.

But would Paulina consent to this?

It was a serious matter; interest and premiums on this new loan would be two thousand a year. Who was to bear this burden? Mr. Witherby could not. He was embarked in an expenditure which could not be curtailed in any way; the very attempt would be ruin; destroy the whole prestige which had gathered round him; undo all that he had gained, and reduce him once more to the beggarly practitioner on a few hundreds a year! No; Paulina must do it, or nobody.

But would she?

It was hard to say. On the whole, Mr. Witherby believed she would. It was putting his mastery to a sharper strain than he could have wished, unquestionably;

introducing into their relations an element of risk which had not existed hitherto. In their former encounter, he had felt absolute confidence in the result; now, he was compelled to discuss it on the balance of probabilities. But he believed the balance to be in his favour; and, at all events, there was no alternative; time pressed. Let him decide the point forthwith.

A long struggle, and, this time, an obstinate one.

On Paulina's part, alternating between vehement passion, and abject, helpless terror.

On Mr. Witherby's, conducted warily but firmly; with as entire self-possession, as perfect a mastery over every syllable spoken, every look, every gesture, as if his own fate had not been trembling in the balance. When it was over, he had succeeded on all points.

The Brighton house was to be given up; a quieter ménage organized elsewhere, compatible with the income, still sufficient for

comfort and even luxury, but greatly reduced in amount, which Paulina would now retain. In the enjoyment of this, on the other hand, Mr. Witherby guaranteed her an immunity from all further demands. He pledged his word ; and there could be no doubt that it would be kept, in his own interest : this was the extreme point to which he could push matters.

The very extreme point.

The ultimatum thus reached was so atrocious in itself, so galling to the person on whom it was imposed, that, as Mr. Witherby descended the stairs when all was over, even he experienced some relenting. Even to Judas came those three unforgotten warnings !

Very far down in the region of the man's heart somewhere, there was a solitary, struggling pang. Mr. Witherby had been, in some sort, a good man. And Paulina had, undoubtedly, been a good friend to him ; the author of his fortunes, had he been content with their lawful development. The

two memories met ; exchanged greetings, as it were, in that remote inner chamber, the only one to which avarice and greed had not yet penetrated ; uttered some faint protest against this new iniquity !

This phase soon passed indeed ; the half-dozen words which Mr. Witherby exchanged with Paulina's footman on quitting the house were sufficient to dissipate it. The *duæ sorores*, the twin promptings of better things, departed elsewhere, and the gates of penitence remained barred for all time.

But meanwhile the man's appearance at the door, his liveries, the sight of Paulina's carriage which drove by as Mr. Witherby walked to the coach-office, set him thinking in another direction ; one which led to important results.

Had not the "extreme limit" been more than reached ?—overpassed ?

He had won his victory ; but what sort of victory was it ? Paulina's irritation had been extreme ; over and over again, but for consummate management, the game would have been lost ; she would have defied him,

dared him to do his worst ; in words she had actually done so. What security was there now his back was turned, that those feelings would not revive, carry everything before them ; turn victory into defeat ? Under this new arrangement, carriage and footmen, with twenty other things of which they were the representatives, would have to be given up ; a thousand a year could not possibly support them. *Would* Paulina do this ; hold to her bargain when it came to the actual performance ? It would be simply intolerable to her ! And yet, what remedy, what other course was there ?

The coach-office reached ; the journey to London half completed ; and still, over and over, the same question ; still, no answer to it.

But then came an inspiration.

Other course ? A most obvious one ; now that Mr. Witherby had thought of it. When it occurred to Watt, one memorable Sunday afternoon, that his steam-engine

might as well have two cylinders as one, he marvelled that this solution of a life's problem should be at once so simple, and so tardy in presenting itself. And Mr. Witherby felt hardly less surprise.

Why, here was the very thing! Paulina's income might be kept at its present amount, actually augmented; and Mr. Witherby might get all he wanted at the same time!

Why should not a bargain be made with Evelyn to cut off the entail?

As her grandfather's settlement stood,—ignoring, that is, the absolute revocation of it which was in Mr. Witherby's own custody,—Evelyn and Paulina were now, or might easily become, the only persons interested in the estates; the latter entitled during her life, the former absolutely entitled when the life dropped. Evelyn, while her stepmother lived, and without her consent, took nothing at present, and could do nothing. Paulina, who took everything at present, was equally powerless as regarded the future. But the two together could do whatever they thought fit!



Exactly the circumstances in which a "family arrangement" is constantly made!

And why should it not be made now? Let a hundred thousand, a mere bagatelle on estates of this value, be borrowed, nominally for Paulina, but in fact to be handed over, after paying off the existing mortgage, to Mr. Witherby. Evelyn would be rewarded for her consent by an annuity, say of two thousand a year, during the rest of Paulina's life; Paulina would be left to receive the whole income minus the annuity and interest;—two thousand a year more than she had at present, instead of two thousand less. Everybody's position would be improved! The more Mr. Witherby thought of the plan, the better he liked it.

Of course, there was Evelyn's concurrence to be obtained; but this would probably be easy enough. She was twenty-one, and now in England: just returned to Chelmsford from a continental residence which had extended itself, for various reasons, to three years. There was no formal difficulty, therefore; and no reason to fear any other; small

risk that, with this golden bait in the present, any girl would refuse! Everything augured for the best.

By the following afternoon, Mr. Witherby had his scheme digested, and, framing the excuse of some business documents overlooked on his late visit, again presented himself in Paulina's drawing-room.

A very different scene this time. Paulina made no secret of her joy.

The preceding twenty-four hours had been passed by her in a petulant, restless state, boding little good to her tyrant; more than one letter of absolute revolt had been penned to him and torn up again. It was just the balance between prudence and passion, and the latter might at any moment gain the day.

And Paulina's relief was great in proportion. She became cordial in a moment; apprehended the advantages of Mr. Witherby's plan; gave a ready assent to it herself, and undertook to obtain the like from Evelyn. Some correspondence had been kept up be-

tween them during these last three years, and Evelyn had expressed a wish to see her on her return to England ; an invitation to Brighton would doubtless be at once accepted.

The new compact was accordingly ratified ; and the contracting parties separated on better terms than they had known since Mr. Witherby's acquisition of the secret which he had turned to such advantage.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A LOVELY summer's day ; bright and warm, without being oppressive. Brighton is full ; but the drawing-room of the Steyne house ignores the throng of visitors, and carries the eye to the sea beyond, rippling and sparkling in the sunshine.

In the shaded balcony of the room Evelyn Rayner is seated. She is alone, for Paulina, as heretofore, is a late riser ; book in hand, but not even affecting to read its contents. She has other occupation. Ceaselessly, and almost without movement, her eye travels over the heaving mass before her, following it until its play of light becomes undistinguishable on the horizon.

Evelyn has been a fortnight at Brighton, and is glad now that she has paid the visit. It was dictated by kindness only ; Paulina

was her father's widow, and she would not wholly disregard this claim upon her, but otherwise they had little in common. But Brighton proved unexpectedly congenial, or the Brighton sea, rather; a companion of Evelyn's school-days, and now linked for her with a far deeper interest. The tide which rolled almost to her feet was the same on which Malcolm had embarked those three years before. Somewhere beyond that dim horizon-line his vessel must have passed; perhaps even closer in-land, in sight, it might be, of the very house. Leagues upon leagues away, but still on the same continent of waters, was the scene of his shipwreck!

Evelyn could bear to think of this now. For months, the agony had been too terrible; but now she had nerved herself to realize what must have occurred. That Malcolm's life had terminated there she felt no doubt. There was no absolute proof of it, indeed; wrecks had occurred and rescue taken place often enough; had any act of hers depended upon its acknowledgment, she

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would not have acknowledged it ; her tongue, her hand, should never, while her own life lasted, cut off the last hope. But in Evelyn's secret heart she never doubted how it must be ; she had combated the conviction, but it forced itself upon her. And, gradually, with its acceptance, came the ability to dwell upon its details.

And there was happiness now in doing so. Happiness in picturing Malcolm, as she knew he must have been at that supreme moment, brave, earnest, unselfish ; in believing that in his last thought, his last prayer, she must have had a part. The mischance which had parted their lives was now over ; the interdict annulled for all time !

And now, with the sea itself before her, Evelyn felt this even more forcibly. She gazed as it were upon *his* tomb. In its depths lay engulfed all that could claim her affection on this earth. In the blue sky above them smiled the promise of a world more bright and more enduring ; writing its lesson of love as tenderly as if it watched over the turf-graves of some village churchyard !

Evelyn's thoughts were thus occupied on the morning of which we write. They were interrupted by the entrance of her hostess.

"You are fond of the sea," said Paulina, after greetings were exchanged.

"I could look at it for ever," answered Evelyn; "it is an old friend, but one which I never tire of."

"I loved it too at Amalfi years ago," said Paulina with a half-sigh, one which was quite genuine; a recollection of the time when she was not false and *was* happy. Little satisfaction had the falseness brought her hitherto!

"Do you know Amalfi?" asked Evelyn. "I spent a week there last summer."

"I lived there all my life, nearly," said Paulina: "it was one of the last places I visited before leaving Italy. Almost a fatal one to me," she continued, as her thoughts recurred to the incident in the Dragone gorge.

"How was that?"

"My nurse lives in the neighbourhood, and I was gathering some flowers to humour

her, when I nearly fell a victim to one of our snakes. Poor Veronica ! how frightened she was. And how anxious that I should get that occhio."

"Occhio?"

"Occhio d'oro is the full name," said Paulina; "the country people believe it restores, or creates love. But I beg pardon; I am inflicting my girlish memories upon you, who know nothing of such matters."

Evelyn coloured to the temples; the tell-tale blood mantling as visibly as ever. Her companion observed it, but made no attempt to penetrate the secret; Evelyn was nothing to her personally; what she was concerned with was to find some opportunity of bringing forward Mr. Witherby's arrangement, and, as yet, none such had offered. To-day, however, was to be more propitious.

"I should not like Italy as a residence," Evelyn said, continuing the conversation, but changing its topic. "It is very beautiful, and our English climate is often gloomy enough; but there is a fresh, happy look here which one misses elsewhere. I shall never



think any place equal to Stanton Court. Have you been there lately?"

"No, indeed," said Paulina, "not since I settled in Brighton."

"I feel half inclined to take it in my way back to town," said Evelyn. "I suppose it could be managed?"

"Quite easily. But you must not think of leaving yet."

"I have trespassed upon you for a fortnight already."

"And you must continue the offence for at least as long again. As to Stanton Court, the carriage can take you to Tunbridge, and then you can easily post on; but you will find it all shut up."

"There is some one in charge, I suppose?"

"Only the gardener Parkinson, and his wife. It was useless my keeping a staff of servants in the place."

"You have quite decided not to return there, then?"

"Quite, I think. The fact is . . ."

Paulina hesitated. Here was the very opening she had so long wished for: but

she was nervously apprehensive of making any false step! Evelyn waited for her to proceed, and, after a minute's delay, Paulina did so.

"The fact is," she resumed, "my income is greatly reduced. I could not afford to reside at Stanton Court now, even if I wished."

"I am very sorry to hear it;" said Evelyn.

"It is my own fault; partly fault and partly misfortune; I have been imprudent, and can afford nothing beyond my establishment here. And even that may soon have to be curtailed; circumstances have occurred which will throw a still more serious charge upon me. I have been thinking once or twice lately . . ."

Paulina again hesitated. "Please tell me," said Evelyn kindly; "at least if it is any relief to you to do so. I have not much power of helping, I fear, but I can sympathise with you."

"You have every power of helping," said Paulina, making the plunge at last; "helping me, and at the same time obtaining a con-

siderable advantage to yourself. But I hardly like speaking of it ; it seems as if I had invited you here on purpose."

"I invited myself, you must remember," said Evelyn, "so do not let that be an obstacle. Let me hear what the help is."

"It is just this. As things stand at present, my income of eleven thousand a year is merely nominal ; eight thousand have to be paid away, upon two different accounts, as soon as received. And now, quite recently, I have become liable to a further demand ; one which will leave me a thousand a year only, compelling me, of course, to change my style of life entirely."

"I am grieved indeed that you should be thus embarrassed," said Evelyn. "Is there no way of extricating yourself?"

"None whatever, unless, as I said, you help me."

"But how can I do so?"

"Very simply," said Paulina. "The embarrassment arises from the whole payment of which I spoke having to be made out of my life income. If, instead of this,

the amount could be raised by a mortgage on the estates, leaving me to pay the mortgage interest and a further sum,—say two thousand a year,—to yourself, I should be greatly the gainer; and, of course, you would be also. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so," said Evelyn. "But how could the estates be mortgaged? My grandfather put them into settlement, as you know; that was what the . . . the trouble was about, five years ago." Evelyn shrunk from referring to the Chancery suit more explicitly.

"I have not forgotten that," said Paulina. "But the settlement, as I have ascertained, would be no difficulty. With my concurrence, you could bar the entail, as it is termed, and become absolute mistress, subject only to my life interest: and out of this, for my own sake as well as yours, I would gladly pay you the two thousand."

"I knew about the entail," said Evelyn; "but I thought it meant that the property would go to . . . to others after me."

"To your cousin, Malcolm Rayner, you mean?"

"Yes. That is . . ."

"You are quite right," said Paulina, whose eagerness prevented her observing the hesitation of Evelyn's reply. "You are quite right; it will go to him unquestionably, if you do not prevent it. But by cutting off the entail as I propose, you will exclude him and his heirs altogether; it will be as if he had never existed."

"Then, Paulina, I cannot do what you ask. I could not have done it as a bargain, in any case; but, in fact, I cannot do it at all."

Evelyn spoke gently, but firmly, and Paulina looked at her for some moments without replying. She was wholly unprepared for this result. A tide of bitter feeling; disappointment, consternation at her own prospects, vexation with her visitor, swept confusedly over her.

"Do you mean that you will not assist me?" she at length asked.

"I would have done so," said Evelyn, "as

far as my personal interest was concerned, although I should have greatly disliked mortgaging the estates. My poor grandfather was always so proud of their being unincumbered ; so proud that they had been passed on to us as he received them, every acre lawfully and rightfully our own."

"One cannot act upon sentiment always," said Paulina.

"It is far more than that, Paulina. Still, I might have got over the feeling, had I been the only person concerned. But I cannot consent to strike my cousin's name out of the settlement, as you say I should be doing. Nothing should induce me to do so."

"Excuse me," said Paulina ; "but surely that is Quixotic ; especially after what has happened."

"I know that would be the general idea," said Evelyn, mournfully. "But I cannot, and will not, do anything to . . ."

Evelyn checked herself abruptly. She had thought that Paulina's last words referred to Malcolm's loss in the Castlereagh,

and her unfinished sentence would have echoed her own feeling in regard to this. However certain this might appear to others, she herself would never, in terms, admit it ; least of all, do what she was now asked to do, prejudice Malcolm's succession by a final, irreparable act !

But a moment's reflection showed her that she was mistaken. Evidently, Paulina knew nothing of the Castlereagh or its fate ; nothing of Malcolm's supposed loss. And her next words made this quite clear. The glance of thought through Evelyn's mind had been instantaneous, and the conversation proceeded without pause.

"You will not do anything to affect Malcolm Rayner's interest in the property, however remotely ;—is that what you mean ?" asked Paulina.

"Yes," said Evelyn.

"You will not do so, even after what happened about the Chancery suit ; even when, as you admit yourself, no human being would understand your refusal ? You mean this ?"

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"Yes," repeated Evelyn.

An ominous flush rose to Paulina's temples, but she did not forego her purpose even then. Again and again, in every form of entreaty and persuasion, she endeavoured to shake her visitor's resolution.

But quite ineffectually. Evelyn replied with the same gentleness as ever, but with entire decision.

"Do not press me further, Paulina," she said at last: "I cannot do this: indeed I cannot. Had we not better drop the subject?"

Hitherto, by a strong effort, Paulina had remained externally calm; but her self-control deserted her now; once more the Italian blood stirred within her. And to this was added the pent-up irritation of three years; finding its vent at last, although not against the person who had provoked it; hurrying thought and utterance with it.

"Take care," she exclaimed fiercely, starting from her seat in the excitement of the moment and advancing close to Evelyn; "Take care how you defy me."



"I do not defy you, Paulina," said Evelyn, greatly astonished at this change of manner.

"You do, you do," said Paulina, her voice trembling with anger. "But you had best beware. You are in my power, proud and insolent as you are; absolutely in my power."

"Power to do what?"

"To make a beggar of you, Miss Rayner," said Paulina; "strip you of your borrowed plumes: one word from me would do it. I should suffer too, but that will not restrain me if I am provoked. Take care."

"I have no conception what you mean," said Evelyn; "but that is perhaps immaterial. Once more, had we not better drop the subject?"

"Immaterial, is it?" echoed Paulina, transported now by her passion out of all self-restraint. "You may find yourself mistaken as to that. Supposing I were to tell you that you have no title whatever to the Rayner estates; that they belong, at this very moment, wholly and solely, to the person

of whom you have just spoken ; to this Malcolm Rayner ?—what would you say then ?”

Evelyn made no reply. She sate in utter bewilderment ; motionless, voiceless, almost breathless, in her intense agitation. *Was this possible ?*

Paulina, mistaking her companion’s silence for incredulity, became still more irritated. The jealously hoarded secret leapt from her lips.

“ You disbelieve me, do you ?” she exclaimed fiercely. “ I tell you, Miss Rayner, I have seen the paper myself ; had it in my own hands ; it is in my solicitor’s possession at present. Does that satisfy you ?”

“ The paper ? What paper ?”

“ One which Philip Rayner wrote a few hours before his death,” answered Paulina in the same passionate tone. “ One which treated me like a dog ; took everything away from me, and from yourself too ; gave it all to those others, to John and John’s heirs.”

“ I do not understand,” said Evelyn, trying to rally her thoughts. “ My grandfather

intended to do something of the kind, I know, but he had not time, he was . . . , that is, Mr. Miles did not come to him."

"He had done it quite effectually himself," said Paulina, "malediction be with him. The simple writing in this case was as valid as twenty deeds would have been; neither you nor I have the smallest interest in the property. Everything belongs to your cousin, Malcolm Rayner; at least, if we are such idiots as to tell him of our discovery. The paper was found by accident where your grandfather had left it, in the pages of his blotting-book."

Paulina lowered her voice at these last words, and with something of dismay perceptible in her tone. It flashed across her that by this outbreak of passion she had incurred a serious peril. Who could say that Evelyn's "Quixotism," as she had termed it just now, might not induce her to disclose this; reinstate Malcolm Rayner in the rights of which he was thus being defrauded?

Paulina stood aghast at her own impru-

dence. In her recent excitement, she had spoken of the results to herself with indifference; but already she trembled to think what they might be!

Evelyn, meanwhile, was even more troubled than her companion. That Paulina's statement was correct she did not question for a moment; her vehemence had the very stamp of truth upon it. Quite intelligible, too, that her grandfather might, in his impatience, have penned this document, thereby carrying out in fact what was intended to be the subject of a more formal instrument. But, but, if so, how bitter were the reflections thus suggested! All the time, then, this supposed barrier between herself and Malcolm had no existence! Their union might have taken place, not only compatibly with Malcolm's promise to his father, but in accordance with John Rayner's own expressed wish; the voyage, with its fatal consequences, might have been averted! But it was too late now!

Evelyn's emotion at this thought was uncontrollable; she could with difficulty restrain

herself even before Paulina. Without trusting her voice to reply to the latter, she made some hasty excuse, and for the rest of the day remained in the solitude of her own room, weeping long and very bitterly.

Two days later, Evelyn left Brighton.

No reference had been made during the interval to the subject of their late conversation. Paulina was tortured with apprehensions as to its possible results, but to recur to the topic in any way was still more perilous. On the morning of her guest's departure, however, her anxiety compelled her to speak. Some apology for her rudeness was tendered, and readily accepted by Evelyn, who had almost forgotten this aspect of the case. Then Paulina hazarded what had been trembling on her lips for the last forty-eight hours.

"Of course," she said, "you will consider what I told you the other day as strictly confidential?"

"About that paper of my grandfather's, you mean?"

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“ Yes,” answered Paulina. “ You will give your cousin, Malcolm Rayner, no intimation of what passed between us?”

“ There is little fear of that,” said Evelyn, sadly.

And with this assurance Paulina was fain to be content.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE days wore on after Evelyn's departure ; and, each day, Paulina became more sensible of the folly she had perpetrated, more terrified at its consequences.

Incredible that she should thus have committed herself ; in a momentary paroxysm of anger, betrayed the secret on which her whole future depended ! Now that there was the risk of losing it, Paulina began to think of the thousand a year which might still be her own with due appreciation. Not so bad an income, after all ! Severed by a gulf too frightful to contemplate from the utter destitution, the worse than destitution which would await her, should Evelyn divulge what she had been told !

And yet what was to prevent this ? Evelyn had given no promise, no assurance

of any kind ;—simply, as it now seemed, passed the matter off, as if expressly to reserve all rights about it. No restraint upon her of any kind !

At length, this disquietude became more than Paulina could keep to herself. There was one person, and one only, to whom she could confide it ; and in her extremity she resolved to do so. She would see Mr. Witherby. Every trace of irritation against him had vanished by this time. Gladly and thankfully now, were it still feasible, would she accept his first arrangement ; surrender the additional sum demanded, and enjoy what would still remain to her.

A note was despatched to Mr. Witherby accordingly : could he oblige her by coming to Brighton at his early convenience ?

Mr. Witherby could do so, and came. He was anxious, on his part, to hear how the negotiation had prospered ; the delay hardly augured well ; Paulina's note too, read more like failure than success. Altogether, Mr. Witherby felt some misgivings on his way down.



But how immeasurably short were these of the fatal reality ; the confession which Paulina, with ashen lips and a quaking heart, at length brought herself to make to him ! Mr. Witherby was a man of habitual self-command, but it all but deserted him now. He saw the position in a moment ;—the wand had fallen from his hands ! Let him be sole possessor of the secret, and he could coin it, he had already done, as he might continue to do, into its thousands and tens of thousands ; but impart it to a third person, and it was not worth sixpence. And now, this had been done ; and the recipient of the disclosure, of all persons in the world, was, Evelyn Rayner !

With a hardly suppressed imprecation on his client's folly, Mr. Witherby questioned her, again and again, as to what had passed. But quite uselessly ; nothing new was elicited. There was something about it, indeed, which he did not quite understand ; like Paulina, he was ignorant of Malcolm's supposed fate, and, from Evelyn's character, would have expected her at once to have informed her

cousin of everything. No light, however, could be thrown upon this ; and, after all, Evelyn might not have chosen to confide to her step-mother what she proposed doing. At this very moment, the communication to Malcolm might be in course of being made !

Mr. Witherby ground his teeth in vexation at the idea. Had Paulina been capable of observing, she would have seen how profoundly he was moved ; the personal consternation into which her news had thrown him. But her own anxiety was too absorbing for this.

“ Can nothing be done ? ” she asked helplessly, after every detail of the narrative had been sifted thrice over. In her despair, Paulina almost knelt to her self-constituted master ; the attempted revolt of a few weeks back had made her subjugation only the more complete.

A fierce rejoinder rose to Mr. Witherby’s lips ; it seemed hardly worth keeping on any terms with Paulina ; retaining a hold which might soon be so valueless. But he checked

this. Let him secure what he could, while he could; carry out, at all events, his original ultimatum to Paulina; the alternative, to himself, was immediate, hopeless ruin.

"That is rather the question for yourself, Mrs. Rayner," he said, in his usual tone. "Have you any means of coming to terms with this young lady?"

"None that I can see."

"Ah! Unfortunately, too, she has left you; I do not mean that you could have prevented this, but it adds to the complications. Had Miss Rayner remained at Brighton, you might possibly have removed the impression; persuaded her that what you said was badinage."

"I fear not," said Paulina.

"Well, probably you are right."

He did not pursue the point, and, for a minute or two, neither party spoke. Mr. Witherby was the first to break the silence: he was anxious to cut the dialogue short, and realize his own position under these altered circumstances.

"You have no suggestion then to make?" he asked.

"I fear not."

"Nothing has occurred to you in any way; no influence which you could bring to bear on your step-daughter?"

"None," said Paulina. "The only thing," she added, after some hesitation, "the only thing which I did think of . . ."

"Yes?"

"It is too childish to mention. It just crossed my mind the day before Evelyn left; something which passed that morning had reminded me of it. But I do not like troubling you with such nonsense."

"I cannot read enigmas, certainly," said Mr. Witherby, who had some difficulty in restraining his impatience.

"I did not mean to perplex you. What happened was only that I was wishing, in a sort of school-girl way, that I had not said what I did; or that Evelyn could forget all about it. Then it occurred to me that if she had remained here . . ."

"Yes? well?"

"It is really too foolish to mention. I thought that I might have given her some of the . . . something which I have upstairs."

Mr. Witherby's attention, which had greatly flagged during the last few sentences, became suddenly and powerfully arrested. He fixed a keen look on the speaker.

"Given her something?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing of the least consequence," said Paulina, with a nervous half-laugh: "only what our people in Amalfi call a love-potion. Of course it is useless for that," she continued hurriedly, as her listener again made a gesture of impatience. "But it has other properties."

"What others?"

"What made me think of it," said Paulina, "is that it affects the memory, if taken in any quantity."

"Indeed, how do you know that it does?" asked Mr. Witherby.

"A medical man told me, the son of my old nurse at Amalfi; he happened to be at

home when she was drying the flowers for me."

"The flowers?"

"Yes, the occhio d'oro, as they call them; I have a whole drawer-full of them in my dressing-case; she insisted on my taking them to England."

"For that purpose, of course; the love-potion, or whatever you call it."

"Yes. That was how the son, Giuseppe, came to speak of it. I said, jestingly, that I should try the effect some day, and he advised me to be careful."

"But did he mean that it could act on the memory, without doing any other harm? That is absurd."

"No," said Paulina, lowering her voice; "of course it would enfeeble the mind altogether. Only, as Giuseppe explained to me, the loss of memory would be the first symptom."

"I understand," said Mr. Witherby. "And had Miss Rayner remained here, you would have tried the experiment with this view?"

"I should not have dared, really," Paulina answered: "as I told you, it was a mere child's fancy. I discarded it at once."

"Just so," said Mr. Witherby. "I suppose, by the way, it is hardly likely that she will pay you any further visits?"

"Most unlikely," said Paulina. "Her manner quite changed after that conversation, although it hardly seemed like offence, either; I was puzzled by it. But I did not venture to press her staying on."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Witherby. "However, I will think matters over, and see you again. I shall have to trouble you shortly about the security for the twenty thousand, which of course must go on now."

Paulina was entirely submissive as to this, and Mr. Witherby then took his leave, the self-control which he had exercised during their interview lasting him, with some difficulty, to its close. Relieved from the necessity for it, he abandoned himself to fierce passion. He cursed Paulina. Cursed himself for his infatuation in trusting the negotiation to her. Ransacked every resource

of a fertile brain in hope of repairing the disaster.

But quite fruitlessly. Hour after hour, through the coach-journey to London, the solitary evening at the hotel there, the sleepless night which followed it, the mind plodded on its round of thought, returning incessantly to the same point. No hope. None.

In one direction, indeed, a ray of some kind did, or might, have shewn itself. No light, but a lurid gleam, the harbinger of a darker guilt than any into which Mr. Witherby had yet plunged.

That potion, preparation, drug, whatever it was, of which Paulina had spoken !

Childish enough, as she had rightly said, the use to which her momentary fancy had destined it. But, but, in firmer hands ?

“ Enfeeble the mind, altogether,” would it ?

Even as Paulina pronounced the words, Mr. Witherby mentally repeated them more than once ;—it flashed across him that there was a possible application of her nurse’s gift which would not be child’s play ! The idea



had suggested itself on the spot, then and there. Now, in his extremity, he recurred to it in more detail, and, at first, with some satisfaction.

"An enfeebled brain!" he thought: "not absolutely so, of course, but partially; just enough to respond to external pressure;—it strikes me that that would be pretty much what we want! Assume that the young lady and her stepmother can be brought together again, and we might make something of this; keep the present in abeyance, and do all that is necessary in the future. The 'disentailing deed' would be feasible enough under these conditions; only, its results should not be restricted to one hundred thousand, or two hundred either! As to Mrs. R.'s part in the matter, she must, and should, 'dare!' And it would be safe enough; absolutely safe.

"And yet," he continued, as a new current of despondency swept over his thoughts, "how chimerical all this is! As if any further intercourse between the two were possible! idiocy even to think of it. Nothing for me to do that I can see, even if this

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disaster on the Exchange is tided over, but settle down quietly at home once more; quill-driving! The accursed folly of that woman!"

With these reflections, Mr. Witherby, in the early light of the June day-break, at length sunk into an uneasy slumber.

Meanwhile, in one point, fortune was more propitious to him than he supposed. The renewal of intercourse between Paulina and her step-daughter, far from being chimerical, was an event which by the express desire of the latter, and in the regular course of events, was on the very point of being brought about!

To explain this, we must follow Evelyn to her adopted home at Chelmsford; not immediately on her return there from Brighton, but a week or two later; about ten days previously to Paulina's recent interview with Mr. Witherby. Or rather, before doing so, we must take up the thread still further back for a few minutes, and relate what has befallen our acquaintance Eldon Bligh meanwhile. The two narratives dove-tail into each other.

## CHAPTER X.

WE left Eldon Bligh undergoing the disappointment and anxiety into which he had been plunged by Evelyn's illness ; the illness which had resulted in her three years' absence on the Continent.

Anxiety, indeed, was allayed when she became capable of attempting the journey ; still more so, when the post from time to time brought Miss Bligh letters from her. Eldon was not favoured with a sight of these ;—why should he be supposed to care for a young lady's correspondence ? And he was far too jealous of the secret with which his life was burdened to ask any questions outside the frontier-lines of mere passing interest. Still he contrived to ascertain that she was practically convalescent.

But as anxiety became less keen, disap-

pointment made itself felt in the inverse ratio.

Eldon had not only discovered that he was in love, but he meant to prosecute his suit ; the Long Vacation following was to have been passed at Chelmsford, and specially devoted to this purpose. But during the greater part of this Evelyn was unable to leave her room, and when she at length did so, it was the eve of her departure ; Eldon saw her for a few minutes only before starting. A world of preparations had gone to make the meeting palpably accidental. But they might all have been spared. A few friendly words, a kind smile, and then, seas and mountains lay between them.

And so they had lain for the three years afterwards.

No very insuperable barrier, indeed, to a lover. The seas, at all events, were passed. On each of the two Long vacations during this period, Eldon was in Switzerland ; and somewhere in Italy, on the other side of those rose-tinted aiguilles, was Evelyn Rayner.

But, the first time, her address was uncer-

tain when Eldon left England, and neither hint nor inuendo in his letters to Miss Bligh would elicit it: she obstinately refused to see what was expected from her. There was nothing for it but a downright question; and after destroying sheets of foreign note-paper he succeeded in putting this. But so obliquely, with such manifestations of unconcern in the result, that when an answer came, and Eldon, dashing up-stairs to a location au cinquieme, tore the envelope open, he found that the writer had altogether forgotten to refer to it!

The next "Long," fortune was more propitious. Evelyn was at Cadenabbia, and would pass the autumn there. Eldon ascertained this before starting; and, after self-imposed delays of all kinds, eventually, towards the last fortnight of his outing, succeeded in reaching Lucerne. Nothing but the St. Gothard now lay between them. And Eldon's portmanteau even crossed this; it went by diligence to Lugano, and he was to follow on foot. Then, from Lugano to Cadenabbia, was an easy distance, any day.

But Eldon himself never surmounted the barrier. He got as far as Andermatt, and there stopped short.

What had he been proposing to do?

To force himself upon Evelyn, wholly without invitation or excuse of any kind! Not among friends either, but in a foreign hotel, and in the society of mere travelling companions;—Miss Alsager, as Eldon knew, had returned home months before. What, again, did he purpose by the intrusion? Was this an opportunity for advancing his suit, exposed to the gaze of strangers all day long, himself canvassed, his object detected, the rest of the party amusing themselves at his cost? Intolerable!

The portmanteau returned to Lucerne; Eldon himself basely diverging up the Furca, and rejoining it after ten day's mountaineering. Then back to England again. Then, as he stepped on the pier at Dover, came the reaction; imprecations on his own folly, his own cowardice! Imperative work pressed, or he would at once have retraced his steps to Lucerne;—probably with a repetition of the same results!

However, the three years were over now, and Evelyn was in England. But not, in the first instance, at Chelmsford; to Eldon's intense mortification, the Brighton visit had intervened. But this too came to an end; and no impediment now existed. A casual enquiry elicited from Miss Bligh that her visitor had returned; and, two days later, nervously and timidly as a truant schoolboy, Eldon presented himself at her door also.

Again, with what object?

The question was easily and clearly answered this time. If there was one thing Eldon had resolved upon with the whole force of his will, it was that, during this first visit, and probably for many which would follow it, Evelyn should receive no intimation of his feelings. Keep away from Chelmsford, now that she was, at length, in visible and tangible presence there,—that he could not do. But equally impossible, after the interval which had elapsed, that he should advance one hair's breadth beyond

the merest, the most conventional acquaintance!

This was Eldon's programme; and for the first two days;—it was Whitsuntide again, as it had been those three years before,—he carried it out to the letter. Evelyn was as much perplexed at him as ever. Whether she had offended him, or whether he intended to offend her; whether he was in debt, in love, or overworked, she could not guess. All that she could discover was that there was something wrong. Never had he been so cynical, so captious, so morose. Even Miss Bligh, on the second day, suggested a doubt, in private conference with Evelyn, whether her nephew would not do well to see Dr. Adamson, before he left. Evelyn had hardly the data to form an opinion; but she agreed with her hostess that he was far from being himself.

“Or rather,” she added, laughing, “he is more entirely himself than I have ever seen him. It is a generous, noble self in many ways, but it has a singular predilection for exhibiting its least attractive side to society.



But please forgive my impertinence, dear Miss Bligh. I only ventured on it, because I do so heartily like your nephew."

Miss Bligh's forgiveness was easily won on these terms; and, as Eldon relaxed at dinner, and exerted his undoubted powers of making himself agreeable, the party separated for the night mutually pleased with each other.

But the following morning witnessed a wholly new state of circumstances.

No summons to town this time; nothing external to divert Eldon from his prescribed course. The aberration came from within.

When he descended to the breakfast-room, the resolution that his sentiments towards Evelyn should under no circumstances be avowed was as strong as ever. Nothing should induce him to open his lips upon such a subject! He might, under extreme exigency, have admitted a dentist's fingers inside his mouth. But no compulsion should unclothe that hedge of the teeth, as the rhapsodists of the Homeric poems speak, to any suggestion from the soul-life within.

The meal came to an end, and the table was cleared. The room was cool and pleasant, however, opening on to the lawn, and Eldon remained there, endeavouring to divert himself with a volume from one of the book-cases.

Quite uselessly. He would not trust himself in the drawing-room, for Evelyn would be at work there all the morning; it would be added torture. But he might just as well have done so. Her name danced up and down the pages before him; her voice, her figure, took bodily possession of him, excluding rational thought of every kind.

Enraged and wearied at last, Eldon flung the book to the further end of the room; then, somewhat ashamed of himself, walked forward and picked it up. As he did so, a light step sounded on the gravel outside, and Evelyn entered with a basket of cut flowers.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I had no idea that any one was here. Perhaps you are busy?"

"No," answered Eldon in his surliest tones.

"I shall only interrupt you for two minutes," said Evelyn. "This used to be my work at Stanton Court, and Miss Bligh kindly leaves it to me here; I have come to put these in the vases. Look, are they not beautiful?" And Evelyn passed her hand lightly over the petals.

Eldon gave some half-audible assent;—the contents of the basket might have been eggs and butter, for any perception he had to the contrary. Evelyn continued.

"I enjoy these much more than hot-house plants," she said. "It seems so cruel transplanting flowers to the wrong season; they ought to have the happiest of weather. This bright June is exactly the time for them; their holidays."

"It is bright," said Eldon, as grimly as before. He hardly dared trust his own voice: every pulse was quivering within him. Could he only be one of the blossoms thus petted! Could he only print one kiss on the hand which caressed them!

"You must be enjoying your holiday too," said Evelyn, who was in a persistently frank

mood this morning ; perhaps had a womanly pleasure in trying to unearth a companion so unsociable. " You seldom get one, I suppose."

" No, hardly ever. Except the Long Vacation, of course."

" Ah ! yes, I forgot that. Nina's brother, Charles Alsager, is a barrister like yourself, so that I hear a good deal about it ; he goes fishing in Norway usually. But you can hardly leave England, perhaps."

" I was in Switzerland last September," said Eldon.

" In Switzerland ?" Evelyn echoed ;  
" where ?"

" Different places. Chamounix. Zermatt. Lucerne, part of the time."

" Lucerne ! Oh ! what a pity ! Why, we were on Lake Como ! How I wish I had known of it !"

Eldon's heart gave a great bound, but he said nothing.

" It would have been so pleasant to have seen you," Evelyn continued ; " we were three ladies, all by ourselves, and you would

have enlivened us so much. I do so wish you had come on there."

Human nature could forbear no longer. Eldon sprung up from his seat, where Evelyn fronted him, and crossed to the other side of the room. "Miss Rayner," he exclaimed abruptly, "don't tempt me. Don't, for heaven's sake!"

For one moment, Evelyn was simply startled by this exordium. In the next, her woman's instinct told her what it meant. She coloured deeply; more vividly than ever did that unforgotten parting at Stanton Court now present itself! She was troubled too on her companion's account; no suspicion as to his feelings had ever yet crossed her mind. Now, she saw all, and cast about for some mode of checking further speech, if possible.

But he gave her no time. Walking hurriedly to her sofa, Eldon placed both hands upon the back of it, and spoke as passion prompted.

"I did not mean to say, it, Miss Rayner; the words leapt from me; but I must go on

now. I knew you were at Cadenabbia. I had resolved to go to you there, resolved it twenty times over; but I did not dare: the stake was too tremendous. Oh! Miss Rayner, Evelyn, can you, will you love me?"

She tried to speak, but again he would not give her time: he could not face his answer.

"Of course I have no claim," he went on; "I don't mean in position only, but in other things; this horrible temper of mine: I am so morose, so selfish, so vindictive. But I *can* love, I do love with my whole life's strength. And, when a man does that, he can conquer anything; dross can turn to gold. Evelyn, tell me that I may love you!"

He had taken her hand in his, but she gently disengaged it. And in the action he read what followed.

"I am so very sorry," she said. "I do hope this has been no fault of mine; I had not the most distant idea of your . . . of what you have told me. But, Mr. Bligh, it cannot be."

"You cannot love me?"

"Not as you would wish," said Evelyn, in great trouble. "Not at all, in the way you mean. I do like you very much, I always did; but there never can be anything more than that between us. I am so sorry to give you this pain."

The kind words added fuel to the flame. Eldon made no answer, but drew a chair to the table, and, resting upon it, buried his face in both hands; more than one scalding drop found its way between them.

A few minutes passed thus. Then he started up, and with uncontrollable emotion almost flung himself at Evelyn's feet.

"Miss Rayner," he said, "do, do give me hope: this is life and death to me; you can't tell what it is. Do say that I may hope, some time or another. I do love you so intensely. I have buried it all these years, but it has been agony to do so; and now . . . oh Miss Rayner, do give me the chance; months hence; years! Only say I *may* hope!"

Evelyn was profoundly moved; in her

womanly pity she felt strongly tempted to consent. But she resisted; something told her that compassion was not love; that she never could love,—now at all events,—as the vehement nature before her demanded.

“I must not,” she said, “Mr. Bligh; for your own sake I must not. Try and believe this; try and look upon it as quite hopeless.”

The utterance, although kindly as before, was decided, and Eldon accepted his sentence. But by no means tranquilly; a current of bitter feeling set in, and for the moment he yielded to it. “I have some more fortunate rival, I conclude, Miss Rayner,” he asked, rudely enough.

The tears sprung to Evelyn’s eyes now; the rudeness of his words was effaced by the recollections they awakened.

“Not more fortunate,” she said, turning her head away.

Eldon saw the movement, and repented instantly. “I am a brute,” he said, “worse than a brute; forgive me, if you possibly can. I had no right to put that question.”

“I do not mind telling you,” said Evelyn,



"especially if it will help you to . . .  
to forget the kind interest you have felt in  
me My love, such as it is, has long since  
been given elsewhere. But it has been given  
hopelessly. It was so, was quite hopeless  
for a reason which I need not refer to, even  
at the time when it was bestowed;—and  
returned. And now, since then . . .  
It was my cousin, Malcolm Rayner," Evelyn  
continued, a flood of tears breaking forth at  
the name. "He was lost on his passage to  
the colonies; the ship foundered with all on  
board."

"Do not distress yourself further, dear  
Miss Rayner," Eldon said, with a gentleness,  
tender and almost womanly as her own;  
"I cannot bear it. I am only intensely  
grieved that my question should have  
awakened such painful memories. I met  
Rayner once, and a fine young fellow he  
was."

"You spoke of him on your first visit  
here, three years since," said Evelyn. "The  
loss occurred soon after that."

A sudden hope here shot through Eldon's

mind. His rejection, then, was the result of this previous attachment, not of anything personal to himself; and this interval had already elapsed! He could not forego pleading for this last chance.

"I will not trespass upon you further," he said; "at least, only with one question. Is it quite, quite impossible, that, hereafter, your feelings may undergo some alteration? Time will do much."

But Evelyn shook her head.

"It cannot be," she said; "I should only mislead you if I gave you the hope. I never can love again; my heart is quite broken."

Eldon could say no more. "You forgive me?" he again asked, extending his hand.

"There is nothing to forgive. At some future time, when you have forgotten this unhappiness, I hope we shall meet once more. I shall always think of you with sincere friendship. Good-bye."

So they parted, Eldon returning to town an hour or two afterwards.

## CHAPTER XI.

ON reaching the Temple, Eldon despatched some pressing papers, and then, after a hasty dinner, returned to spend the evening in chambers.

Not to work : the conflict of feeling had been too vehement ; the few hours' business which he had got through had only been achieved by a powerful effort. Now, the pent-up thought insisted on having its way. Throwing himself back in an easy chair, Eldon pressed his hands on his eyes, and recalled the agitating scene of the forenoon.

At first, bitterly enough, although with a strange conflict of feeling. Rejected ! Evelyn hopelessly lost to him ! And for what ? For this boy-cousin, the object of some transient attachment ; dead, too ; dead for three years

and more! Intolerable! And not even allowed the chance of competing with this memory in the past! Refused point blank; told, almost in so many words, that if he were to urge his suit for years, it would be equally unsuccessful! Could there be a greater insult to a man?

And yet, what a ruffian he was! Insult, indeed! when she had shewn such gentleness, such divine pity throughout; anxious only to spare him pain; listening to his ravings so patiently! And how lovely she had looked, how much more than lovely; what a Paradise it had seemed, those few minutes during which he had dared to hope! Bah! what was the use of thinking of it?—Forget all about that morning's work, and as speedily as possible; that was the only sensible thing to do. Bah?

Eldon started up from his chair, and paced the room vehemently, as if to banish reflection by main force.

To some extent he succeeded; not in banishing it, but in changing its character.

The evening was delightful, even in London ; the sun, already sinking behind the Abbey, poured a stream of light along the river, while a fresh air blew in at the open windows. Something in the scene gave his thoughts a new direction ; brighter hues began to mingle with them.

After all, after all, *was* his love quite hopeless ?

Evelyn had told him so, no doubt ; and, no doubt, she believed it herself. But she had confessed a liking, almost a partiality for him. Nothing then, in himself, to prevent this ripening into some warmer feeling ! And as to this external obstacle, the attachment to which she clung with such tenacity : could it go on for ever ? Would not time, as he had himself said, do much ? Hereafter, a year hence, two years, might he not renew his suit—and be listened to ? Some delay, some necessary patience, and Evelyn might still be his !

The reflections thus awakened were so engrossing that some one had knocked at the

door twice unheard. The third attempt was more successful.

"Come in," Eldon answered in a tone which expressed decided impatience at the interruption.

The person who entered was a young man, scarcely more than a boy; the figure slight but muscular, and the face bronzed by exposure to weather. A pleasant face; and, just at present, with an expression of extreme delight in it. The new-comer did not wait for Eldon to speak, but came forward and extended his hand.

"Oh! sir, I am so glad!" he exclaimed. "This is the fifth time I have been here to-day, and I was afraid I should have missed you. Our ship sails to-morrow, and I must go back to Southampton by the mail presently."

"But I don't know who you are," said Eldon, whose irritation had subsided by this time.

"Oh! Mr. Bligh! don't you remember me? Andrew; Andrew Patten. I have not forgotten your kindness, sir, at all events."

"Andrew? Is it possible? Why you are grown out of all knowledge. Here, sit down and tell me about yourself."

Andrew complied, and a bottle of sherry and glasses were produced from Eldon's resources.

"I don't know if you heard of the loss of the Castlereagh, sir?" asked Andrew, after some preliminaries had passed.

"The Castlereagh lost! What do you mean?"

"She foundered in a gale, sir, somewhere off the Azores. Four of the crew escaped besides myself, and one passenger; the rest went down with the ship."

"I had no conception of this," said Eldon: "how fortunate you have been. Tell me about it."

"I hardly like thinking of it," said Andrew, "it was dreadful misery while it lasted. We were on a raft; the boats were all swamped, but the boatswain and carpenter, with the other two men, had got this floated, and took us in. But I would rather speak of what I came for, which was to thank you

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for your goodness to me, Mr. Bligh. It has saved me, soul and body."

"No, no, go on about your escape. You have time, have you not?"

"Twenty minutes more, sir," said Andrew, looking at a silver hunting-watch which he produced from his waistcoat pocket. It would have been hard indeed to recognise in the well-to-do young sailor who sate in Eldon's chambers the ex-pickpocket of the Southwark Square!

"Very well," said Eldon, "I will take care you do not overstay your time. Now go on. You were picked up by some ship, I suppose?"

"No, sir, we reached land; at least, two of us did, the passenger and myself. The others died on board."

"What land was it?"

"Pico, sir, in the Azores; a current carried us in there; partly that and partly a sail which I managed to get up; the gentleman who was with me was too ill to do anything."

"And how do you come here now?"



"One of the Fayal ships put in at Pico," said Andrew. "They were bound to China, and wanted a steward's boy, the same situation which you kindly got me in the Castle-reagh. I would not have left Mr. Rayner, only he was so much better then."

"*What?*" ejaculated Eldon, starting up with such vehemence that he almost overturned the table before them. "What name did you say?"

"Rayner, sir," repeated Andrew, much surprised at his host's impetuosity.

"Do you mean that he was the passenger you have been telling me of?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know him?"

"No. Yes. No. Never mind. You say that he was saved with you?"

"Yes, sir: or rather, it was through him that I was saved at all." And Andrew detailed the particulars with which the reader is already familiar.

Eldon listened to the narrative in silence, and almost without comprehending it; he seemed stupefied. But there was a further question to ask, and he put it.

"Wait a minute, Andrew," he said. "This gentleman, this Mr. Rayner that you speak of;—do you know his Christian name?"

Andrew reflected for a minute. "I am afraid not, sir; I never heard it. And yet I seem to know it, somehow. Oh! yes, of course."

"Of course what?"

"I saw it in his Testament; Mr. Rayner often lent it me on Sunday evenings. It was a curious name, sir, I don't know that I can pronounce it; it was spelt, Mal, Malco, . . . then, l, m. Is that right, sir?"

"Oh! yes; right enough. Bah! And he was saved, you say?"

"Saved from the raft, sir, but he was very ill; he couldn't have lasted much longer. When we came ashore at Pico, they took us to a country-house called Las Riveiras, and did everything for us."

"And Mr. Rayner got better before you left?"

"The fever was better, sir, but he was

very weak ; however, he would soon pick that up. Then from Fayal he could get on to Tasmania, as he intended."

Eldon made no reply, but leant back in the chair, as he had done once before that evening, his hands pressed on both eyes. Presently he started up and looked at the clock.

"Your time is up now, Andrew," he said ; "good bye. Thank you for coming to see me."

"I wouldn't have sailed again without doing that, sir," said Andrew. "Our captain got a new ship almost before he landed, a much larger one ; only he must be ready to start that day week. But I bargained that I should have one clear day in London."

Eldon shook the speaker's hand warmly ; even in the agony of his own thought, he was touched by his protégé's affection.

"And how long shall you be absent this time ?" he asked.

"Five years, sir, at least, and probably very much longer. We are not going the regular China voyage, but further north ;

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some trade in skins and ore, which only comes to the coast occasionally, and very little of it ; but it is so profitable that it is worth waiting for."

"Well, good bye ; God bless you. Here, stop a minute ; this may be of some use to you."

And, without heeding protestations or thanks, Eldon pushed his visitor out on to the landing, with a roll of bank notes, left that morning as counsel's fee on a brief, and large enough in amount to have started Andrew as a trader on his own account. Then Eldon returned to his arm-chair.

But not to repose. Still less with any purpose of thinking over what had just occurred. Thought was the very thing he was trying to escape from ; he thrust it from him : had it been possible, he would have effaced memory also.

But it was not possible. Tugging at his heart, sounding in his ears like an alarumbell, was a conviction which he could not

silence. Evelyn must be told this news of Andrew's!

To do him justice, he fought most vigorously against the suggestion. "It shall not be, it shall not be," he exclaimed aloud, more than once.

What? sacrifice the very chance, which, one half-hour before, had approved itself to him as an undoubtedly good one? Surrender love, happiness, the whole wealth of life, to a fanatic scruple? And all for the sake of this boy-rival; one in whose comparison he and his pretensions were held so cheap? Insanity! *He would not*

But there would be dishonour in not doing it?

Nonsense; what dishonour? In love, as in war, everything is fair. And this would be simply keeping his own counsel, using an advantage which fortune had sent him;—Andrew going to the Antipodes, absent for years and years; the secret locked in Eldon's own breast! As to young Rayner himself, he was clearly in no hurry to communicate the news of his safety. It was the old

story, most probably ; the young lady's affections far the more deeply interested of the two : why should he, Eldon Bligh, interfere in the matter ? He would *not* do it.

But he did do it.

He succeeded in his resistance up to a certain point. The clocks struck eight ; too late for the Chelmsford mail that night, at all events. The prompter within had suggested, not merely action, but immediate action ; better not expose himself to the risk of after-thought ; do the right thing, straight out. And that he could not do now. Eldon sunk back in his chair with a grim satisfaction as he realized the fact.

But then came a reaction.

Evelyn came and stood before him, as it were ; lovely, even in her bitter grief, as she had looked that morning ; finding room, even in that grief, to feel for, to compassionate himself. And was this how he was requiting her ; her, the woman he pretended to love ? Keeping from her, for his own base ends, what would have turned her sad-

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ness into *such* joy ; nursing his hopes, mere hopes, mere possibilities in the future, at the cost of her suffering ?

Too late for the mail ?

Yes, but what difference did that make ? Start at once, and he could easily post to Chelmsford before his aunt's bed-time. Perfectly feasible ; he had known it was so all the time, but in his selfishness he had chosen not to know it. Let the start be made.

Eldon penned a few rapid lines, and placed them in his breast-pocket : then he hastened down stairs, closing the door behind him with a vehemence which resounded through the inn-court. Half-an-hour later he was on the road to Chelmsford.

## CHAPTER XII.

AN exquisite drive. The suburbs quickly passed; the open country stretching beyond; overhead, the soft June twilight and trembling stars, serene as the vestibule of Heaven.

But no peace visited Eldon's breast. The impulse under which he had quitted chambers began to die away, the recoil set in; the tide of wounded love, resentment, jealousy, again surged through heart and brain.

He struggled against them; for he had recognized now that these, and not his own generous purpose, were the real adversaries. But they were clamorous to be heard. Running upon him open-mouthed. Riving the very soul with their conflict.

Then, about half-way along the road, came a last, a special temptation. He had for-



gotten something all this while! Had not Evelyn told him, that very morning, that even had Malcolm Rayner not been lost in the ship, their love was quite hopeless? And, if so, would not the announcement he was on his way to make be the reverse of kind; torture her fruitlessly, revive all the bitterness of disappointment? Would not the true kindness be to leave her with her present belief as to Malcolm's fate?

It was a subtle suggestion, and Eldon had well-nigh yielded to it. Once he actually called to the driver to turn back, but the man failed to hear, and he did not repeat the order:—he would be taken for a lunatic! No, he must go on now. And, after all, it was the right thing that she should be told, come what might of it. No province of his to decide what was best for her.

As they entered Chelmsford, the church clock struck eleven; just in time! He drove on to the house, and rung.

"Miss Bligh had retired for the night," the servant said, "but Miss Rayner was still

in the drawing-room; would he go up there?"

Eldon passed the speaker without reply, and darted up-stairs. Even now he would not trust himself with a moment's delay.

Evelyn was seated at the table, writing. "Mr. Bligh!" she exclaimed, in amazement. "What has . . . I mean, I hope nothing is the matter?"

"No, nothing the matter," said Eldon, defiantly. Love and rage were struggling within him, and, in their conflict, he took refuge in his wonted stronghold of cynicism: intensified now into actual rudeness once more. He must have sobbed like a child had he not done so.

"Shall I call Miss Bligh?" asked Evelyn, whose surprise was in no degree lessened by his manner. "She is only just gone up-stairs."

"No, certainly not," said Eldon. "There, take that and read it; at least, if you like to; *I* don't care."

As Eldon spoke, he took from his breast-pocket the note he had written in chambers,

and thrust it into his companion's hand. But in the next instant, he withdrew it still more abruptly.

"Wait a minute," he exclaimed; "we may just as well understand each other first; just as well know what we are about. Do you not think so?"

"Unquestionably," said Evelyn, with some natural offence in her tone, although it disappeared almost immediately.

"Then just tell me something first," continued Eldon; "something about this . . . the person you spoke of this morning."

"Do you mean my cousin?" asked Evelyn.

"Yes. He was sailing to the colonies, you said?"

"Yes."

"What colony?"

"Tasmania," Evelyn answered. In spite of herself, a strange, wondering surmise leapt into her heart, effacing all sense of her visitor's want of courtesy. She trembled so much that she could hardly pronounce the word.

"And the name of his ship was . . . ?"

“The Castlereagh.”

“Oh! yes, of course,” said Eldon, savagely; “as if there could be any doubt about it! I knew that well enough before I asked. There, take the thing now; I have done with it.”

An irrepressible sob broke from the speaker as he once more forced the paper into Evelyn’s hands, and closing the door as noisily as he had done in chambers, began to descend the stairs.

But it was only to retrace his steps; so instantly, that Evelyn had not time even to glance at the writing.

“Forgive me once more, if you can, Miss Rayner,” he said, in a tone which contrasted more than ever with his late vehemence; “forgive me, if you can. I think you will when you know all; when you have read that; at all events, it is the last time that I shall have the chance of offending. When I quitted you this morning, I was presumptuous, mad enough to dream, even after all that had passed between us, that there might be still some hope for me; not at present,

but hereafter. Now, with that paper in your possession, I know there is none; we part for all time. Will you give me your hand as an earnest of pardon?"

Frankly as ever, Evelyn extended her hand to her strange visitor. He pressed upon it a passionate kiss, one in which the whole emotion of his nature seemed to concentrate itself; then, hurrying from the room, re-entered the post-chaise. By two, A.M., he was once more in chambers.

There was no fire there, of course; no lights placed; no refreshment; nothing. And Eldon wanted nothing. He flung himself on the nearest chair, and sate there in a paroxysm of grief; the June day streaming into the room, hour after hour, with increased brightness, until at length it warned him to move. Should he not do so, he would be surprised in that position by his "laundress"!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

A FEW fitful hours' sleep in bed. Then, Eldon dressed once more, and forced himself, or rather was driven by the combined pressure of clerk and clients, to resume the work which had been neglected during his recent outing. It was like eating chopped straw, but there was no help for it; the thing must be done.

Noon came; afternoon; four o'clock, five o'clock; and still Eldon paced the mill-round; very heart-sick, very famished,—for he had scarcely tasted anything for twenty-four hours,—but seeing no escape. Half-past five; a quarter to six. Then deliverance did arrive.

The Chelmsford post; a letter from Evelyn.

Left in quiet possession, at length, of her

note, Evelyn had opened it, and read as follows.

“ Miss Rayner,

“ Your cousin was not lost in the Castlereagh. He landed at Pico, one of the Azores ; and my informant, the only other survivor from the shipwreck, left him there a month afterwards, doing well. I know nothing since then.

“ E. B.”

The revulsion of feeling on reading this was almost too great for Evelyn's newly-restored strength. Malcolm safe ! the life over which she had mourned so long, so profoundly, still subsisting ; his eye still gazing on the same sky and ocean with her own, himself still her own ! Incredible !

And yet, could she doubt the fact ?

From any other source, she might ; but, coming from Eldon Bligh, it was quite certain ; his very rudeness, his strange manner that evening, vouched for its truth. Easy to guess, too, who the informant was ;

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Evelyn perfectly recollected what had passed about Andrew Patten three years before. Joy indeed, beyond words; effacing for the moment from thought and memory everything but their one theme! Malcolm lived!

Yes; and under what altered conditions for both of them! *Things were not as they were!* Evelyn's heart bounded, even while her cheek crimsoned at the thought. Paulina's words, the disclosure which had seemed so valueless at the time, rung in her ears now like a chime of music.

"Neither you nor I have the smallest interest in the property; everything belongs to your cousin, Malcolm Rayner!" Evelyn had listened with small interest at the time; the barrier raised by his rash promise was gone, but a still more fatal obstacle had interposed, those drowning depths of the Atlantic! But now! But now!

Evelyn hastened to her own room, and, kneeling by the bedside, offered a tribute of the heartiest gratitude to the Great Being



whose protection Malcolm had experienced. Then, seating herself, and pressing her hands to her forehead, she strove to recall every detail of her conversation with Paulina on that memorable day.

And she succeeded ; some words were lost, but the greater part came back to her completely. She rehearsed it to herself two or three times, and then, determined to risk nothing, committed the whole to paper.

It was long past midnight before she had finished, but she could not rest even then ; read and re-read the manuscript ; tried to recall some lost link of thought, some phrase or accent of the speaker. She was wearied out at last, and slept soundly and happily.

With morning, however, came sobered reflection ; colours toned down ; objects stood out in the neutral tints of daylight. Malcolm was saved, thank God ; but that was three years since. Where was he now ? still safe, still well ? That he had not written was no cause for misgiving ; it was Evelyn's own request ; besides, how should he suppose that

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she knew anything of the shipwreck? But three years was a long time in itself; Evelyn's heart sunk at the thought of what might have happened during the interval!

Then, again, as to Paulina's disclosure; had she not been over-sanguine as to the results of this? The document to which it referred existed, no doubt; idle to question it; but how was it to be obtained, how acted upon? Malcolm, too, should be at once communicated with; who was to do this? Mr. Alsager might have helped her, but the family were again absent, travelling in Germany; besides, she would have shrunk from avowing her attachment even at Chigwell.

In this strait, Evelyn's eye fell upon the note which lay open on her dressing-table. A new idea darted into her mind. The writer of this strange epistle, so strangely compounded himself; generous, impulsive, chivalrous in his attachment to her; more than chivalrous, as Evelyn felt, in thus conveying the news of Malcolm's safety—might he not assist her?

That he *could* do so, there was no question.

He was the person of all others to meet the emergency; a lawyer, already in part acquainted with the facts, one in whose honour and intelligence she could equally confide.

He *could* assist. And would he not?

Evelyn would try, at all events. A nature of lower stamp might have hesitated, but she judged Eldon by herself. She sat down and penned the following lines.

“ Chelmsford,

“ . . June, 18 . . .

“ Dear Mr. Bligh,

“ I will not attempt to thank you for your unselfish kindness; I could never do so properly. Perhaps the best proof that I feel it, is that I am about to tax it still further.

“ The news you brought me, wonderful as it is, becomes doubly so in connection with another matter, as to which I need immediate advice and help. Will you give me both? I have no other friend to look to; no one with whom I can consult in any way. Some-

thing tells me that you will not refuse this, even at the cost of added pain to yourself.

“Yours sincerely,

“EVELYN RAYNER.”

Such was the despatch which the afternoon's post brought Eldon.

He did not take one moment to deliberate. Snatching up hat and stick, leaving business to take care of itself, he ran at full speed through the Temple, and just caught the afternoon coach. Three hours later, and for the third time within two days, Eldon found himself the occupant of his aunt's drawing-room, which a few words secured for his conference with Evelyn:—“he had come at her special request, on urgent business.”

“Thank you for your confidence,” he said, when she entered soon afterwards; “it has not been misplaced. Every faculty that I possess shall be at your service, now and at all times, most entirely. Now what can I do for you?”

Evelyn sate down, and, with a throbbing heart, but clearly and unaffectedly, told the whole story. The family troubles; Philip Rayner's death, and the treachery which had frustrated the reparation he intended to make. Malcolm's love and her own. The circumstances which led to the avowal of this; followed, almost in the same moment, by the recognition, on both their parts, of its hopelessness. The supposed loss of the Castlereagh, with all on board;—a portion of the narrative which Eldon supplemented by the particulars gleaned from Andrew the day before. Finally, Paulina's application to her to join in cutting off the entail; her own refusal; and the outburst of passion in which Paulina had referred to this document, whatever it was, under which Malcolm was absolutely entitled to the estates.

Here alone Evelyn hesitated; should her visitor still cherish any hopes, this would be the death-blow to them. Eldon saw the feeling, and, wrung as his own heart was, hastened to remove it.

"We will find that paper," he said, with

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the sweet smile which formed such a contrast to his habitual manner. "But even without it, I think Malcolm Rayner is now morally released from his promise; the property is his of right, although he is not acknowledged owner."

"I hardly know," answered Evelyn. "It was his of right always."

"Well, I am no casuist; we will secure the paper, at all events. Tell me, Miss Rayner; I conclude your step-mother has no suspicion of the state of . . . I mean, of your engagement to Malcolm Rayner."

"Oh! no, none whatever."

"That is fortunate; it will prevent her and Witherby, who must be a thorough scoundrel, from taking alarm; we must obviate any risk of foul play with that writing. That it exists I am quite satisfied; and, at present, it is in the very safest hands. You see what has been happening, of course?"

"Happening?"

"Yes, to your stepmother, whom I could almost find it in my heart to pity. She is

being squeezed like an orange. Her life income would go, as well as your reversion; and as the price of his silence, Witherby is drawing upon this, and apparently, from what you say, rising in his demands. *He* will keep the document safe enough!"

"Poor Paulina!" said Evelyn. "Do you really think this is so?"

"It is as clear as daylight," said Eldon. "The 'charges' of which she spoke are simply his hush-money; and, of course, if we thought fit, we could bring them to an account for their fraud. But that is no concern of ours; what we want, and what we must try and get, is the paper itself."

"How can it be done?" asked Evelyn.

"I must think it over. The first step is that you should at once re-establish some relations with Mrs. Rayner. Do you see your way to that?"

"Quite easily," answered Evelyn; "we parted on civil terms, although, of course, without much cordiality. The only thing is . . . ."

"Yes!"

"I should not like to do anything underhand," said Evelyn.

"Nor would I urge you to ; my present views, so far as I have any, point rather to main force, sooner or later. But this will be my matter, if you will leave it to me."

"Only too gratefully," said Evelyn.

"Very well. Then, for yourself, all that is needed is to be as much as possible with your stepmother. Find out all you can about this paper ; its nature, its contents ; any particulars connected with it. Observe, too, what is going on ; whether Mr. Witherby is still putting pressure upon her ; what are his times of coming and going. You need not commit yourself to any promise, to equivocation of any kind ; simply, be with her, and watch *him* ; he is the person we are mainly concerned with. You have no scruple as to this ?"

"Oh ! no ; it would be foolish to feel any."

"Most needless, at all events," said Eldon.

"So that is settled, and I will leave to you to arrange an early visit to Mrs. Charles Rayner. And, by the way . . ."



"Yes?" asked Evelyn, as he paused.

"It has just occurred to me that some corroborative evidence as to this instrument, or writing, or whatever it is, would be most valuable. Will you repeat to me, please, as nearly verbatim as you can, what passed between your step-mother and yourself that morning; about its discovery, I mean. Where was it found?"

"In the pages of grandpapa's blotting-book," Evelyn answered; "'where he had left it,' were Paulina's own words."

"What blotting-book was this?"

"The one in the library, no doubt," said Evelyn; "it stood on the small leather table there; he was confined to his room for several months before his death, and always wrote at that table. Yes, and, of course, I remember now."

"Remember what?"

"Why, he was writing there the evening he died, almost up to the time of his having the seizure. I wonder if it could have been this paper?"

"Quite possible," said Eldon; "his mind

must have been full of the business for which he had sent for his solicitor. I wish we could find out something more about it. The name of your family seat is . . . I have forgotten for the moment."

"Stanton Court," said Evelyn.

"Is any one living in the house?"

"Only a gardener and his wife."

"Would it lead to any remark if you went down there for an afternoon?"

"None whatever," answered Evelyn. "I had thought of doing so on my way back from Brighton the other day, but the rupture with Paulina prevented it."

"Go then as soon as possible," said Eldon; "I will come and see you on your return. In what state would the room be which you spoke of?"

"Grandpapa's library?"

"Yes. Have any changes been made there?"

"Oh! no," said Evelyn; "the servants all shrink from entering it."

"Search the room thoroughly then, and everything in it; thoroughly and minutely,"

said Eldon; "you will see yourself how much may depend upon this. And now I had better leave you. I shall return to town the first thing after breakfast, and before my aunt it may be as well not to refer to this matter."

## CHAPTER XIV.

EVELYN was not long in paying her proposed visit to Stanton Court, which she reached early in the forenoon. The lawns and carriage-drive were in some degree of order, but the place itself looked deserted; blinds down and shutters closed; an air of desolation, more mournful than ruin itself, overspreading the familiar details.

Evelyn drew up to the main entrance, but the bell remained unanswered; its echoes within enhanced the general sense of loneliness. At length she dismissed the carriage, and, taking her travelling bag, walked to the side of the house, where the smoke from one chimney still gave signs of habitation. But here too all was closed; the occupants were absent, and might be so for hours. There was no help for it; and, seating herself out-

side, Evelyn awaited their return as patiently as might be, not without some amusement at this undignified reception of an expectant heiress.

But graver thoughts soon crowded upon her; the memories, pleasant and painful, with which the place teemed; the purpose with which she had now revisited it; anticipations, anxieties as to its result. In the course of these the woman in charge of the house returned; an old family servant, who knew Evelyn well. She had been shopping in Earlsford, and exclaimed at the sight of her visitor.

"Deary me, Miss, who would have thought it; and that Parkinson and myself should both be out! You hav'n't caught a cold sitting there, Miss?"

"No fear of that to-day, Mrs. Parkinson."

"But ye mun be tired, and hungry. I will run and open the great door."

"On no account," said Evelyn; "and please take no trouble about me. I daresay you can make me up a bed for to-night."

"A score of them, the company rooms and

all. But maybe you'd like your own room in the east wing best."

"That I should; thank you for remembering it. I am quite alone."

"I'd hoped so, Miss," said Mrs. Parkinson, who, like the domestics and neighbourhood generally, had little regard for Paulina, and felt something like awe at her wickedness. "But do ye come in, now, and have some dinner."

Evelyn had discovered that she was hungry, and was glad enough to accept the offer, insisting, however, that Mrs. Parkinson should dine with her; the husband, it appeared, was out for the day.

But the meal was a sore trial; interminable, as it seemed. Her companion had everything to recur to in the past, everything to speculate upon in the present and future; and Evelyn was compelled to listen, grudging every moment, but judging it prudent to exhibit no haste.

At length Mrs. Parkinson talked herself out, and remembered at the same time that the bedroom had to be arranged.

"I will ramble about on the ground-floor meanwhile," said Evelyn. "I suppose it is all open?"

"Oh! no, Miss, we keep the rooms locked up, except just two or three, and the shutters fast too. But I can soon undo them."

Evelyn declined the offer, and taking the bunch of keys which Mrs. Parkinson gave her, listened with a palpitating heart while the latter proceeded leisurely upstairs. The footsteps died away at last; then Evelyn hurried forward to the apartment which Philip Rayner had so long occupied, and, undoing a top shutter, looked round.

The library was in no way changed since Mr. Witherby visited it three years before. Fresh dust and cobwebs had accumulated, but the material features were still the same; the burnt-out ashes still in the grate; the centre-table with the bronze inkstand; Philip Rayner's own writing-table at the side; his chair wheeled up to it; the blotting-book lying in front of this.

The book arrested Evelyn's eye at once. She caught it up, and turned the pages, leaf

by leaf, twice, thrice over. Then the pockets. Then she shook the book itself over the table. But quite fruitlessly. There was nothing.

Useless, of course, to waste more time on this; better as Eldon Bligh had suggested, examine the room generally. The drawers of the table were still locked; but every other depository, possible or impossible, Evelyn ransacked. Lifted the leather hangings over such books as the library contained,—a small collection, fortunately. Looked behind the books. Finally took down the volumes themselves, opening several, on the desperate chance that they might contain something. But fruitless this also. No writing, no memorandum of any kind. Nothing.

With a feeling of sickening disappointment Evelyn returned to the side table. Every article upon it had been already scrutinized, but she repeated the process with each; then, last of all, took up the blotting-book again.

Almost mechanically, this time; she turned



over a few of the leaves, and then desisted ; hope was entirely at an end in that quarter, and, apparently, in every other. The search must be abandoned. There was the rest of the house, no doubt, but that would be a palpably useless task, as well as an endless one.

Evelyn's tears flowed fast. Unconsciously she had built much on the results of this visit to Stanton Court. Something must surely be discovered there ; something which might confirm Paulina's statement, give reality and substance to what was at present so baseless. But nothing had appeared. The "written paper" of which Paulina spoke was still, as before, the sole evidence ; questionable in itself, and, even if it had existed, lodged in hands where its recovery was almost hopeless. Malcolm was as far from her as ever.

As these thoughts crossed her mind, Evelyn's eye rested for a time, although hardly taking in what it saw, on the page which she had last turned, and which now lay open before her. The blotting-paper

was almost new, but this page had been used. Only once, apparently ; the impression of the writing dried there lay in regular lines ; reversed, of course, in position, and illegible.

Illegible, that is, during the five minutes or so for which Evelyn had been looking at it ; meeting the eye, but evoking no action, —ideomotor action as Dr. Carpenter would term it,—from the brain.

At the point, however, which Evelyn's reflections had now reached, the brain did become apprehensive ; suddenly and startlingly. Written before her, easily traceable even in the reversed character, was the very name which at that moment was in her thoughts.

"Malcolm Rayner." No doubt of it whatever.

A long, incredulous gaze, almost in terror. Then, pressing her lips fervently to the words, Evelyn opened the library-door cautiously, and ascertained that Mrs. Parkinson was neither within sight nor hearing. Then she returned to the blotting-book.

And, now that her attention had been directed to it, the page began to yield further results.

At the bottom of the writing, detached from the rest, were traces of what was obviously a signature. Very faint traces; the writing had been feeble, or the sheet pressed less firmly down on this portion; still, some name had evidently been signed there.

Whose was it?

With a beating heart, Evelyn set herself to ascertain. "The paper was found where your grandfather left it; in the pages of his blotting book;" those had been Paulina's words. Was it . . . was it possible that the name could be—Philip Rayner?

Yes; quite possible. Quite clear, to Evelyn's judgment; the "yn" of the surname distinct; in the Christian name, the final "p" distinct also. Whose signature could it be but her grandfather's? And, if so . . .?

Evelyn would not draw the conclusion until she had examined further. In this, however, she found more difficulty. The

blotting paper had been too thick for the ink to shew on the other side, so that the words had to be read reversed, as at first. In themselves, too, they were unfamiliar to her; several of the letters were missing, others imperfectly transferred; the writing had been feeble throughout, and, in parts, the ink had dried before the book was used. Still, there were results even here. Two or three monosyllables were plain enough, as were also the figures "21," shortly after Malcolm's name. And, preceding the latter, less clear but distinguishable on a close inspection, were the still more important words; "my son John."

Evelyn's heart gave a great bound as she made out this name. Nothing further could be deciphered, at least with the imperfect means at her command; but this was sufficient.

Impossible to doubt that, before her here, lay the fac-simile of the paper of which Paulina had spoken; the position, the contents so far as they could be ascertained, even the feeble handwriting, all tallied. The

document had been abstracted. But it had left behind this evidence of its presence, a duplicate self, exact and faithful as if taken by a copying-machine !

Once more Evelyn looked carefully through the book ; but nothing further appeared, and she was well content. Tearing out the important page, she closed the shutters, and ere long was again a patient listener to Mrs. Parkinson's domestic details. But, this time, the abstracted sheet was lying close to her heart, whose throbbings it at once excited and allayed.

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## CHAPTER XV.

THREE days later, Evelyn and her new adviser were again seated in conference at Chelmsford.

Eldon Bligh had thrown himself with all the enthusiasm of his character into the task he had undertaken: having once accepted Evelyn's trust, he justified it by the most absolute devotion. There were times, indeed, when bitter, almost vindictive thoughts would suggest themselves; others, when a love equally passionate would surge up within him, urging him to throw himself at Evelyn's feet, to supplicate for some hope, some compassion. But he never in fact swerved from his course. One smile from Evelyn, one frank avowal of the gratitude with which she accepted his aid,—all the

more gratefully from knowing what it cost,—rallied back heart and energy to their purpose. Eldon would have served her with his life's blood.

Meanwhile, in thus acting, he was in reality adopting the best remedy for his own wound. Evelyn was now his client; his professional instincts were stimulated by the task in which he was embarked; the lawyer began to supplant the lover. Now too that all hope was extinguished, he became more at ease with her. She appreciated as she had never yet done a character, almost boyish in its vehemence but always generous.

"I should not have suited him," Evelyn said to herself one day after she had quitted the room. "His ardent nature requires one to match it; one more emotional than he would have found in me, even if I could have returned his love. He is a noble fellow. A year or two hence, when this trouble is past, he will find some one worthy of him."

On the present occasion, however, the dis-

cussion in which they were engaged banished personal thought of any kind.

On Evelyn's return from Stanton Court, the leaf of the blotting-book had been placed in Eldon's hands, and by him at once submitted to an "expert." He would not trust it out of his own sight, so the process of deciphering took place in chambers, the reader experimenting at one table, while Eldon sate at a distance, professedly engaged with papers, but, in reality, far too anxious to fix his attention upon them. It seemed impossible to overrate the importance of Evelyn's discovery.

And the result showed that he was right.

Slowly but unerringly, the material portions of the writing were spelt out. To the skilled eye now engaged upon them, the reversal of the characters occasioned no difficulty; many of the words were read off almost at sight. What did retard the process was the faintness, or, occasionally, the total absence of the impression in places. Here conjecture must be resorted to; and frequently, after some plausible clue had been obtained, it



was found to lead wrong, and the whole had to be begun again. Three or four hours were thus occupied.

But the task was then complete. With some trifling exceptions, the contents of the paper which Philip Rayner had drawn up in his last moments, exactly as the reader has already perused them, were handed over to Eldon. He ran his eye through them, and hastened to Chelmsford at the earliest moment.

"There is one drawback, I fear," he said, when Evelyn had read and re-read the manuscript.

"What is that?"

"Why, that we are still not in possession of any legal document; or even what would amount to evidence of such. Mr. Holmes has performed his task most ably; restored, by an ingenuity beyond all praise, what it would have seemed impossible to piece together into any sense. But there was one thing even he could not do."

"What was that?" Evelyn again asked.

Eldon pointed to the signature. There

were the two letters Evelyn had herself made out in the surname ; and the concluding "p" of the "Philip," as she had also read it ;— but nothing further. The closest scrutiny had failed to detect the remainder.

"I can give evidence anywhere," Mr. Holmes had said ; "that the transcript is exact so far as it goes. But I cannot recover the name ; it is hopelessly illegible."

"This paper then is of no use after all ?" said Evelyn, mournfully.

"In one sense it is not," answered Eldon ; "we must still, as before, find the original, of which it is the mere impression. And, two or three months hence, I hope to do so. But, from another point of view, as an encouragement to undertake this, an encouragement in every way, your discovery is *most* valuable. It gives us something definite to go upon."

"But still you think this time must elapse before we do anything."

"Yes," answered Eldon. "Before *I* attempt anything, that is."

"Why should this be?" asked Evelyn.

Her companion looked at her with an expression which it would have been difficult to interpret; one of half-amusement, struggling for the mastery with some other and deeper feeling.

"For a particular reason," he said at last. "I must have assistance; support on which I can rely."

"Can you not obtain it?"

"In two or three months, yes: at least, I trust so. But not in any less time. Meanwhile," he added, changing the subject, "you had better arrange for your Brighton visit. Have you heard from Mrs. Charles Rayner?"

"Oh! yes," said Evelyn, "I forgot to tell you. I had a letter from her yesterday."

"She will receive you?"

"'With the utmost pleasure,' she writes. But she is not at Brighton now; the establishment there is broken up, and she has taken a house at Llandudno."

"Llandudno?"

"Yes, in North Wales. It is a small place, she says, little more than a hamlet at

present, although some building is beginning."

"A further indication," said Eldon, "that Mr. Witherby is continuing his pressure. All this you must try and learn more about. Learn everything; the relations between them, his movements, above all, everything and anything as to the custody of the paper they are keeping from us. It is *quite* certain, now, that it exists. And now," said Eldon, looking at his watch, "I must return to town at once, for I have a great deal to see about. I leave town to-morrow."

"Leave London?" echoed Evelyn, in a tone of disappointment. She had come to rely on Eldon's support, and contemplated its withdrawal with dismay. He noticed the tone, and replied to it; still with the same singular expression as before.

"I am sorry to do so," he said, "but there is no help for it. The Long vacation begins the week after next, and I mean to anticipate it this time. I am going abroad, in fact."

"To Switzerland?" asked Evelyn.

"No. I am going to find Malcolm Rayner. Good bye. It will be no use writing to me."

At noon on the following day, Eldon went on board the Fayal packet. And, two days later, Evelyn started for Llandudno, availing herself for part of the distance of the railway to the north-west of England then recently opened.

Unsuspecting, self-invited, the victim came to the knife; the fluttering bird to the meshes of its pursuer!

## CHAPTER XVI.

WE must recur to the narrative of events at Las Riveiras meanwhile ; taking up the thread some two months before the conversation in the last chapter.

The third year of Malcolm's residence at Pico had commenced, and found him still happily located. During the season, his accountant's work kept him actively employed. At other times, the exquisite climate and scenery, the objects of interest which abounded in the island, and, certainly not least, the society of Nelly, whose mind was now expanding, as her rare beauty became more apparent, every day, precluded any wish for change.

The only drawback to his satisfaction arose from an alteration which he had recently observed in Fray Pedro. During the

last few months, the Padre had been far less cordial ; sought his society less, and, when they were together, seemed under some constraint. Malcolm could divine no cause for this. He was wholly unconscious of having given offence, nor did the Padre's manner indicate any. The disturbing cause apparently lay in Fray Pedro himself ; some uneasy reflection which he seemed at times on the point of sharing with his companion. But it never went beyond this, and Malcolm was as far from the solution of his doubts as ever.

In Nelly, on the other hand, there was no change beyond that of her advancing years and character. She was as artless, as unreserved, as proud of Malcolm's notice as ever ; veiling from him no shade of thought or emotion ; his gratified companion in every pursuit. As from the first, they read together, rode together, walked together, boated together : no one cavilled, and, no one interfered. To the Las Riveiras household Nelly was still the child !

But this could not go on. From the flowery margin to the tide which rolls beneath is but a step ; but it is an irretrievable one. In the drowning gulf, the child perishes. From its depths emerges an existence of new joys and new suffering, the yearning heart and throbbing emotion-life of the woman !

Of the occupations just mentioned, riding with Malcolm pleased Nelly best of all. If he had mastered Portuguese, she, in her turn, had become a practised horsewoman. The hand never sought the pummel now ; Nelly would have scorned the imputation.

A certain May afternoon came, at the time of which we are writing, very bright, very fragrant, and not unduly hot : a light sea-breeze fanned the orange-blossoms, and the sky was dappled with clouds. Malcolm's work, never severe at this season, was over for the day ; the family dinner despatched ; the afternoon and exquisite evening to be disposed of as he and Nelly might think best. —As a fact, it was always Malcolm who "thought," while Nelly always discovered that his choice had travelled in the exact direction of her own.



The choice, this day, was the "Perforated rock," one of the natural curiosities of the island. Pico has no Caldeiras, like its more busy neighbour, St. Michael's; but there are hot-water springs on a smaller scale, and the rock they were to visit formed the basin of one of these. It was twelve miles from Las Riveiras, and new to both of them.

For the first league or two, the road wound through the enclosures of Don Miguel's estate. Arable lands, where the young corn already stood high. Groves of orange and lemon, walnut and chestnut. Hedges of aromatic shrubs, festooned with the rose and wild vine. Openings in the foliage, where the ground dipped, and the sea sparkled in the distance.

Then the character of the view changed. They had reached the volcanic plateau of the island; and bare hills, intersected here and there by streams, but elsewhere supporting only the scantiest herbage, showed the altered nature of the soil.

Still further on, the scene became still more desolate, and the scarred cliffs frowned

down on a sterile region, untenanted even by the hardy sheep of the island. This was the vestibule of the hot springs, the steam from which guided them to the spot;—the only guide available, for there was no house within miles. Threading a stony gully which led up to this, they tethered the horses outside a cavern which contained the object of their visit. Near the mouth of this, at some height from the ground, was a kind of stone trough; in the course of years this had become perforated, and the boiling fluid oozed through it, like a sieve or cullender, and fell to the ground in a dense shower.

The play of water, however, was not continuous. At times it surged up, flooding the trough, and filling the place with steam; then it would subside, and not return for some minutes. It was in one of these intervals that Malcolm called his companion's attention to another phenomenon; a bluish grey vapour, almost transparent, which floated over their heads, and lost itself in the external air.

"Where does that come from, I wonder?" said Malcolm. "Are the horses all right, Nelly?"

"Yes, poor things," said Nelly. "There is nothing for them to eat there, but they seem tolerably happy."

"Keep an eye upon them for a minute then; I must find out what makes that gas, or whatever it is. I shall be back directly."

Whirr! whirr!

Without warning of any kind, up surged the hot-water spring, and, for a few minutes, all was steam and seething liquid.

"Let me come too," said Nelly, when the visitation had ceased; "the horses will be quite safe."

"Come along then." And they proceeded to the upper end of the cavern accordingly.

The vapour was again visible, but it was no easy matter to trace its point of exit; there were some large fissures in the rock here, but it seemed to belong to none of them in particular, or rather, to issue from each in turn.

"We can't be beat," said Malcolm.

“Stand where you are for a minute, and I will see where this goes to; it looks like a passage somewhere.”

Malcolm entered one of the openings, but found it blocked a few paces on; two others were tried with the same result. But he was more successful with the next. It led into an inner vault, from one corner of which issued a jet of the gas he had noticed, blue as cobalt, and wreathing itself in fantastic coils round the walls and roof.

“Look, Nelly!” Malcolm exclaimed, “look; how beautiful! Come in here; it is all right, only a little dark.”

It was fortunate for Malcolm that he had summoned his companion. In his eagerness he had advanced within a few inches of the jet of gas;—odourless, but noxious as that of the grotto del Cane. As Nelly entered, she saw him stagger to the side of the vault, where he remained, too faint to move, and inhaling the deadly vapour with every breath. Regardless of any peril to herself, she sprung forward instantly.

It was just in time; Malcolm was rapidly

becoming insensible. Throwing her arms round him, Nelly dragged him into the outer cavern, as near the mouth as strength would allow. The air there soon revived him, and he stood up, little the worse for what had occurred. Nelly herself, overcome with agitation and excitement, sate down on a ledge of the rock, and burst into tears; she tried to conceal them, but they streamed through the hands with which her face was covered.

Malcolm was deeply moved also. He walked up to her, and took one hand in his own.

“Nelly, dear Nelly,” he said, “you have saved my life; saved it a second time, and, this time, at the risk of your own. How can I thank you half enough?”

There was no answer.

In those half-dozen minutes, that rapid alternation of terror and intense joy, Nelly had learnt her life's secret. Through the pulses of being, throbbing in nerve and vein with a rapture which was half agony,

shot the knowledge;—not of “good and evil,” but of, love!

“Dear Nelly,” Malcolm continued, “what a noble girl you are! How can I ever repay you? What can I ever do . . .?”

He stopped abruptly.

Nelly had not spoken all this time. She had withdrawn her hand gently from his; withdrawn the other from her face; they both hung by her side. She was not crying now, but sate trembling very much, her eyes rooted to the ground.

But, at Malcolm’s last words, she suddenly looked up; she could not help doing it, the impulse was irresistible. And in that upturned face, in the one moment during which their eyes met, Malcolm read her secret also.

Unsuspected, unshadowed hitherto, in his remotest thought; but clear now as daylight. He was loved. Every chord in the young heart before him would respond to his lightest touch. A word, a gesture, and Nelly would have sprung to his arms.

It was a strong temptation. Malcolm

would have been more than human,—perhaps it is nearer the truth to say, less so,—had he not felt it. He had no heart to give ; it was still, wholly and entirely, Evelyn's ; he could not, in any honourable sort, respond to this girl's attachment. And yet the inclination to do so was strong upon him ; gratitude, interest, her rare beauty, her devotion to himself, all seemed to plead for it. A strong temptation, in good sooth !

Not temptation, indeed, in its baser forms ;—the “ Costermonger ” and its allies cannot have everything their own way. There was something in the eyes which had encountered Malcolm's during these few seconds, a world of purity in the light which welled up in them, which would have made the suggestion intolerable. True-hearted woman's love, the most impassioned, the most self-sacrificing, recoils from its leprous counterfeit, as Eve did when Ithuriel's spear unmasked the lost angel !

No, not that. But Malcolm longed to make some response, to fold the loving child in his embrace, if but for one second ; print

his thanks upon her lips ; snatch the passing joy, come what might afterwards !

But he thrust the prompting from him ; cursed it in heart and thought, and with lip too ; a more than half-muttered oath. Then he turned his whole care to Nelly. All had passed in less than a minute ; she still sate, her face downcast as before ;—downcast alas ! in hope also. The inspirations of love come fast ; its death-sentences as well as its triumphs. Even in that brief minute, something had told Nelly that her affection was not returned !

But what was Malcolm to do ? How should he act so as to spare her most entirely ? The future was plain enough : he must leave Pico at the earliest possible moment ; that was quite clear. But how to act at present ?

But Nelly herself decided this question ; woman's instinct came to her aid. She had lived years in the last quarter of an hour.

As Malcolm still hesitated, the seething element surged up once more into its trough, and speech and sight became alike impos-



sible. When it subsided, Nelly had risen. Every trace of emotion was banished, and when she spoke, it was almost in her ordinary tone.

"We should be going home, I think," she said. "Can you ride now?"

"Perfectly," said Malcolm; "we will mount directly."

The horses were untethered, and they retraced their steps through the defile, reaching Villa Nuova by sundown. Little was said on the way. Nelly preserved the same indifferent tone, although its brightness was wholly gone. Malcolm, on his part, was sorely perplexed. Over and over again during the ride, he longed to break through the reserve which had grown up between them; to give some comfort, some sympathy. But he forbore; what could he say which would not make matters worse? Best, for Nelly's own sake, that the pain should be borne in absolute loneliness, so far as he was concerned; her secret remain still her own; no consciousness on his part betray that he had divined it. Never, in after-life, should she

have the mortification of feeling that her love had been proffered—and not accepted !

But with the evening, which Malcolm passed in his own room, came a still more difficult question. How was he to quit Las Riveiras ? what excuse could he devise for doing so ? How, above all, break his intention to Nelly herself ?

The night was far spent before he had decided ; but by that time his mind was quite made up. Hard, heartless as it seemed, there must be no leave-taking. This was imperative, even for Malcolm's own sake ; he dared not trust himself any further !

And, this point cleared, the rest fell readily into shape.

Boats were always kept at the landing-place below the house, and a crew easily obtained ; the family often went to Lagens by water. And, in the present summer weather, the passage from thence to Fayal was soon made. Malcolm snatched a few hours' sleep ; then collected the necessaries

which belonged to him, and, before breakfast-time, was some miles on his voyage.

On his table he left two letters.

One was to the Senhôr, apologizing for his abrupt departure. Malcolm was anxious, he said, to carry out his original plan of settling in Tasmania; but life had been so pleasant at Las Riveiras, that unless he forced himself away he felt it impossible to quit it. For Don Miguel's personal kindness and that of the Senhóra he returned fervent thanks; all the more, he added, because he had not the heart to deliver them in person.

The other note was to Nelly. It ran as follows—purposely introducing one topic which, even if it deepened the wound, would tend most effectually to heal it. His own tears flowed fast as he wrote.

“ Dear Nelly,

“ You, as well as your uncle, will be surprised to hear that I have left Las Riveiras. But it was best that I should do so; and it has been such home to me, and we have all been such good friends together,

that I could not bear the pain of a regular leave-taking.

“Good-bye, Nelly dear. I shall always think of you, if I may, as my loving sister; one who has twice saved my life, and whom I shall never forget while that life lasts. May God bless and protect her !

“Had it been wise for me to remain here, Nelly dear, I should have told you a secret before long; the sort of thing one tells to one's sisters, although, as you know, I have never had one of my own. I have been for years attached to a cousin in England of the same name as myself; Evelyn Rayner. Circumstances have occurred which make our union quite hopeless, and it was the misery of this, even more than the necessity of doing something for myself, which made me leave England. Nor shall I return there now: as I have told your uncle, I shall go on to Tasmania, as I always intended. But I shall still love Evelyn Rayner with my whole heart; there is no room in it, really, for any other attachment. Happy as I have been with you all, all these three years, I

have thought of her, day and night, all the time.

“Once more, good-bye, Nelly dear. Always think of me as

“Your affectionate brother,

“MALCOLM RAYNER.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

A DULL, overcast evening ; succeeding the brilliant May day which witnessed Malcolm's departure.

The boat in which he had been rowed to Lagens had already returned. Nelly watched it from the house as it pulled into shore ; then she descended to the landing-place, following the path which, on some pleasant errand or the other, Malcolm and herself had trodden almost daily for three years. The oars were unshipped, the crew dispersed, the boat remained drawn up on shore ;—the solitary link which still bound him to her ! In its stern he had last sate. From its side he had stepped on to the Lagens quay : parted from her there for ever !

Nelly would not stand looking at it. One

long, eager gaze; her hands clasped tightly together, appealing, as it were, to the weather-beaten hull itself for some sympathy; then she walked on along the beach. The woman's heart, the new heart, born within these twenty-four hours, rose up stoutly within her. Malcolm was lost to her, but she would not be lost to herself; would not, even in thought, be unworthy of him. She was to be his sister and no more;—let her school herself to acquiescence!

But Nelly could not return to the house. Backwards and forwards, hour after hour, she paced the beach between the landing-place and the rocky Ponta; purposing nothing, thinking of nothing. Simply stunned.

Evening passed into night, and Nelly was still there; not even conscious of the change. So unconscious, that when some one called her by name, she was astonished to find how dark it was; too dark even to distinguish the speaker. But the voice announced itself.

“ Ere-merinda, child, what are you doing

here? I have been at your uncle's waiting for you. Nobody knew where you were."

"I am coming now, Padre," said Nelly, dejectedly.

Fray Pedro was at her side by this time, and, taking one hand, drew her towards him. He tried to read her face, but, dusk as it was, far too dusk to show the features, she kept it turned from him. The action told as much as the closest scrutiny would have done.

"It is as I feared," he thought; "the young man's sudden departure; this distress of hers; what I have noticed myself, all point one way. I only trust there has been no devil's work about it; if there has . . ." And, as this surmise crossed his mind, Fray Pedro's hand tightened for a moment on the stout oak sapling which he carried. But it relaxed immediately.

"No, no," he said, half aloud, "that cannot be; at least I pray God not. But I will find out, at all events." Then he addressed Nelly once more.

"You will speak to Fray Pedro, darling, will



you not? If there is any trouble, you will tell it all to him; tell him whatever it may be? Come this way."

The Padre led his companion to a bank of shingle and made her sit by him. Then he again entreated her confidence.

But the words would not come; Nelly's heart was too full; overpowered by the sympathy which she had been unconsciously craving, she burst into tears. They flowed long and passionately, while the old man sate by her, caressing her hand.

And at last she spoke. "Oh! Padre," she said, "I have been very, very wicked!"

Again Fray Pedro's hand tightened on his stick. But there was something in the tone which reassured him; heart-broken as it was, it betrayed neither shame nor guilt.

"Wicked, my child?" he asked soothingly.

"Yes. I have loved Mr. Rayner so; loved him more than God, and you, and all the world; I never knew it till yesterday. And now he is gone; he will never come back; never; never! And, if he did, it would make no difference; he loves some

one else ! And I had given him my whole heart !”

“Has he led you on to this ?” asked the Padre. “Has there been any . . . any love-making, as the young people call it, between you two ?”

“Oh ! no, Padre,” Nelly replied, still more vehemently ; “he has done nothing wrong ; it was all my own wicked self. He did not even suspect until yesterday.”

And then Nelly told the story of their yesterday’s ride and its results, ending with the note which had been left for herself that morning. No need of daylight to reproduce its contents ; they were stamped indelibly on the aching heart close to which they lay.

The Padre had little knowledge of love-affairs ; but instinct guided him right, as it had done Malcolm.

“Ere-merinda,” he said when she had concluded, “you have done no evil ; there has been evil-doing, so far as I can judge, in neither of you. It is a heavy burden laid on your young life ; but you must learn to bear it ; God will help you to, if you ask Him

trustfully. And, my child, you must help yourself. If, as you say, Mr. Rayner loves another, however, hopelessly, you must, as quickly and as entirely as you can, shut out from yourself all thought of him."

"I do so," said Nelly, with spirit, "I began yesterday; at least, all thought of him in that way. I will not disgrace him or myself; and it *is* disgrace for a girl to fling away her love where it is not needed. But, Padre, it is very, very hard; you do not know how hard!"

"I think I do," said Fray Pedro. "But, my child, they will expect us at home now."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was some two months later that Eldon Bligh embarked on his voyage of discovery.

The passage to Fayal was accomplished without incident of any kind. There Eldon landed, and, taking the passage-boat to Lagens, proceeded on foot to Las Riveiras, the name of which he had carefully noted down from Andrew's narrative.

No delay or difficulty in this, either. The walk was interesting throughout; and, in due time, Eldon found himself at the commencement of the path which wound up to the house. A low gate opened into it, and Eldon had his hand upon this, when he suddenly stopped short, with a look of dismay. It had just dawned upon him that this was a very singular mission in which he was engaged!

Singular, at all events, as regarded his own share in it! He had set himself to the task with such energy, fixed his attention so exclusively on the means and chances of effecting it, that, up to the present moment, this subjective view of the matter had never occurred to him.

Now that it did so, Eldon stood aghast at the rôle he was playing. He could not keep his reflections to himself.

"I suppose I'm a thorough idiot," he exclaimed; "I wonder if it ever happened to a man before, especially a bad sailor like myself, to cross the Atlantic on such an errand? Actually going to find a lover for the girl who has refused him; spending his own Long vacation in fetching his rival back to England! What a fool I have been making of myself! Well, it can't be helped now."

No; it could not be helped.

But the fool's errand, meanwhile, had produced one result; it had taken Eldon out of himself; there was a practical character about it, which dispelled romance and melan-

choly altogether. He was not, and could by no possibility make himself out to be, a despairing lover. Of course, he was still profoundly in love, and profoundly unhappy; but, for some reason or other, both sentiments had become less obvious of late. Barring the sea-sickness—while it lasted—Eldon might have found it hard to deny that he had thoroughly enjoyed his voyage!

Whether his reflections would have travelled to this conclusion at present, we cannot say; their thread was interrupted.

A light footstep made itself audible on the path above him. In the next minute, as the new-comer rounded some shrubs, Eldon found himself face to face with a young girl, so exquisitely beautiful,—doubly beautiful from an air of deep mournfulness in the features, as well as from the flush of surprise which overspread them,—that he stood almost spell-bound. He had never dreamt of anything half so lovely! Was she real?

Real enough, and sad enough: in fact, the flush was not from surprise only. Nelly had caught Eldon's half-spoken soliloquy, not the

words themselves, but the English accent ; but this was enough to dye cheek and brow crimson. Not Malcolm's voice ; no fear of her mistaking *that*. But a countryman of his ; probably, as we always think of residents on the same soil, one who knew him, or, at least, knew of him ! She did not speak, but passed on through the wicket, which Eldon just recovered himself in time to open for her. He watched the departing apparition for some minutes, and then pursued his way to the house, at the entrance to which he encountered Fray Pedro.

"English again !" ejaculated the Padre ; for Eldon's extraction was patent at a glance. "Is *he* shipwrecked too, or what does he come for ? Well, there are no more hearts for him to break, at all events. He must have met Ere-merinda, by the way, poor child ; we shall want her help, if he has come on any business."

Eldon, however, had mastered some Portuguese during the voyage, and was able to eke out his knowledge with more Latin than Malcolm ; so that the object of his visit was

explained, fortunately, before Nelly returned. The Padre listened to it with profound attention. Malcolm's letter had already made him familiar with Evelyn's name, and the circumstances of his attachment to her; and it was impossible to hear without interest that the obstacles to this were now in a fair way of being removed. "Best thus for Nelly herself," thought the Padre. "Let this marriage be solemnized, and the wound will soon heal; it is a panacea in such cases." Then he turned to Eldon.

"You are Mr. Rayner's kinsman, or intimate friend, I conclude?" he asked.

"No," said Eldon, with some recurrence of the discomposure he had felt on his way to the house.

"Ah? No? Miss Rayner's brother, then?"

"No," said Eldon again: "I am no connection of either of them. I have merely taken up the matter out of . . ."

Out of what? Barrister as he was, Eldon found it hard to produce the fitting English word; still less, its Portuguese or Latin



equivalent! "Out of regard for Miss Rayner," he contrived to say at last.

"She is fortunate," said the Padre, bowing with a pleasant look of amusement. He was attracted by his new acquaintance, and be the mystery what it might, was disposed to put it down entirely to his credit.

"If only this one had come first," he could not help saying to himself; "so worthy of her, to all appearance, and with no English cousin to stand in the way! There are strange contradictions in these love-matters!"

Meanwhile the primary difficulty remained: to find out what had become of Malcolm. Beyond naming one of the shipping agents at Fayal, and repeating what Malcolm had stated as to his intention of proceeding to Tasmania, the Padre could give no assistance. It must be discovered, if at all, by Eldon's enquiries on the spot.

It was now falling late, however, and Eldon agreed to avail himself of the hospitalities of Villa Nuova, which he was assured would be gladly extended to him. If the hope of seeing Nelly once more had

anything to do with this decision, he was rewarded. She returned soon afterwards, and resumed her office of interpreter; saying little herself, and discharging her task with a dejection of voice and manner, which, coupled with her extreme beauty, were inexpressibly touching.

With Fray Pedro, Eldon had a long conversation, Nelly supplying words where either was at fault. Nothing further was said as to the object of Eldon's visit; the Padre had intimated that this was best avoided. They parted well satisfied with each other, and on the following day Eldon returned to Fayal, where he at once proceeded to make the enquiries suggested.

The results of these must be reserved for a future chapter. At present, we are concerned with matters nearer home.

## CHAPTER XIX.

EVELYN's proposed visit to her stepmother had been at once communicated by the latter to Mr. Witherby.

To Paulina it gave unfeigned satisfaction. It was a guarantee, in any case, that her fatal disclosure had not as yet gone further; that Malcolm Rayner had not, under some impulse of honourable feeling, been apprised of his rights. But it was much more than this. It established relations once more between them; condoned the offence, if such it were, caused by Paulina's outburst of passion; above all, made negotiation for the "disentailing deed" once more possible. And to Paulina "the disentailing deed" meant more than ever. The Brighton establishment was broken up, the present triste home at Llandudno substituted;—all this she had

submitted to, under her present dismay, obediently enough, but with the keenest mortification. But let Evelyn consent to the deed, and the mortification would be more than compensated. Paulina would be a free woman once more ; her income larger than even at Brighton, and herself no longer tied to an English residence anywhere.

And Mr. Witherby ?

*He* had very special reasons for satisfaction. The new charge on Paulina's life interest had been carried out, and the client's money repaid ; no longer anxiety on that score. But now, quite recently, a golden bait had presented itself, for which Mr. Witherby's soul panted as it had never yet done. Something which would retrieve his stock-exchange disaster twenty-fold !

The Wheal Eliza mine was one of those adventures which pour wealth into the lap of the wary speculator. Started under happy auspices, a favourite from the first with the inner coteries of the share-market, it had not yet reached the general public. In a few months it must do so. The rush for shares

would then follow ; prices treble, centuple themselves ; the fortunate investors, those who had bought at the low prices to sell again at the high ones, would make their fortunes. Could Mr. Witherby only be one of these latter !

But why could he not ?

Until Evelyn's visit was proposed, the answer was quite clear ; he had no money to buy shares with, and no means of getting any. But now ?

"Negotiation for the disentailing deed was once more possible."

Yes. And "negotiation," with Mr. Witherby, had a meaning of its own. Paulina meant by it renewed overtures to Evelyn, merely ; better handled than last time ; enlisting, if possible, compassion, as well as self-interest. But Mr. Witherby's process, as the reader may recollect, would be more compendious. To "negotiate," in his sense,—assuming that a certain agent of which Paulina had spoken, still existed, and possessed the properties ascribed to it—was to lay siege to the brain itself ; to extort

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from the "enfeebled" intellect and prostrate will, the consent which, under other conditions, *he* well knew Evelyn would never yield. Hopeless enough this had seemed, a few weeks since. But now? Now?

One preliminary indeed still remained; Paulina's co-operation must be secured. She had no suspicion at present of Mr. Witherby's purpose; she might, even with her recent submissiveness, recoil from it; this must be arranged previously. And Mr. Witherby proceeded to arrange accordingly.

Two days before Evelyn's arrival at Llandudno, Mr. Witherby made his appearance there.

He had announced his visit beforehand. He would see Paulina on the subject of her letter; needed a holiday himself; might probably make some stay at one of the hotels.

It was the final struggle. Into its arena descended two combatants, unequally matched in weapons and force. Hesitation pitted against resolve; the evil-doing with which some ruth, some promptings of conscience

were still compatible, against the depravation of good which had extinguished both !

"I hardly see why you build so much upon it," said Mr. Witherby, referring to Evelyn's visit. "It shews that your rashness has led to no mischief as yet, and possibly may not; but what will you gain by having Miss Rayner here?"

"I thought," said Paulina timidly, "that . . . that something might be done. The subject might be reopened cautiously."

"The subject of her barring the entail, you mean?"

"Yes. She might be brought to consent now."

"What makes you think so?"

Paulina was silent.

"Is there any reason why you should?"

"I hoped," Paulina said at last.

"You 'wished,' you remember, the last time we spoke of this; wished that you had not told Miss Rayner your secret, or that she could forget all about it; I am not quite sure which."

"That was mere folly, I know," said Paulina. "Wishing could do no good."

"Not much," said Mr. Witherby; "nor, I fear, hoping either. By the way . . ."

"Yes?"

"There was something else you spoke of when we talked this over in the summer; the 'wishing' had reminded you of it; some plant, or flower, which you had brought from Amalfi with you. What is it its name?"

"The occhio d'oro," answered Paulina.

"Ah! yes, to be sure; I have thought of it more than once. Some curious properties, has it not?"

Paulina looked at the speaker with surprise; what had this trivial matter to do with the business in hand? She did not venture to interpose, however, and he proceeded.

"Have you any of it here with you?"

"All," said Paulina; "it is still in my dressing-case."

"Could you bring me a little? I am rather curious to see it."

"Do you mean at present?" asked Paulina, still more surprised.



"Well, yes, if it is not troubling you too much."

Paulina quitted the room, and returned with some of the dried petals.

"I have not looked at them since my marriage," she said, with the half-sigh which the recollections of Amalfi and her self-betrayed love often forced from her.

By Mr. Witherby the sigh was quite unheeded. He took up the flowers, now reduced almost to powder, and examined them carefully.

"Quite odourless," he said. "I wonder if there is any taste?"

A caraffe and tumbler stood on the side-table. Mr. Witherby poured out some of the water and dropped the powder into it, where it was at once absorbed, leaving no trace of its presence. Then he put the mixture to his lips; a slightly aromatic flavour was perceptible, but nothing further.

"Easily disguised," he said, throwing the contents of the tumbler out of the window, "and easily administered. You thought of trying the experiment once, you said?"

"Not really," answered Paulina; "the idea was mere childishness; it crossed my mind as any other passing fancy might, but that was all. I should have been afraid."

"Afraid, even if the idea had not been a childish one?"

"Yes," said Paulina.

"Even if, instead of being the mere fancy you call it, the experiment could be turned to *real use*?"

"Real use?" Paulina echoed.

"Well, yes. Supposing, for instance, that it would remove any difficulty in obtaining Miss Rayner's consent to what you wish?"

"I do not see how it could," said Paulina. And yet, notwithstanding her words, a dim perception of her companion's meaning, very faint, very shadowy, but still perception in some sort, had dawned upon her.

"I will come to that presently," said Mr. Witherby. "Assume that this would be the result, would you still be afraid?"

"It would be giving poison," Paulina answered, with a tremor which she could not repress.

"Poison? How so? I did not gather that from what you told me."

"It would . . ." She paused midway in her sentence: the veil between them began to be still further lifted. Mr. Witherby supplied the words for her.

"Would affect the mind to some extent; 'enfeebl it,' I think you said. Was not that the term?"

"Yes," Paulina answered.

"But it would not be fatal; would not destroy life. Your cousin . . ."

"Foster-brother."

"Foster-brother, yes; I beg your pardon; the Giuseppe you spoke of. He had seen several cases, you told me?"

"Two or three."

"But none fatal?"

"None that I am aware of."

"Idle then to call it poison," said Mr. Witherby. "Now, as regards the other point. Does it not occur to you that, given in moderate quantities, it might . . . probably . . . without doing any other harm . . . overcome . . . or diminish . . . the

strength of any . . . objection which your step-daughter may . . . still . . . entertain to . . . doing what . . . you wish?"

Mr. Witherby spoke very slowly, pausing between his words. And, before the last two words, there was a very long pause indeed; a minute or so. Paulina looked up at him, but said nothing.

She had not submitted as yet; there was still much to overcome; great uneasiness at this new gulf opening beneath her. But she did not refuse; and Mr. Witherby felt that he was practically master of the field!

"You told me," he proceeded, "that something passed with Miss Rayner about this *occhio d'oro*?"

"I spoke of it to her," said Paulina.

"Spoke of those 'other properties' it possesses?"

"Oh! no. In fact, we had no conversation about it at all. I was talking to myself more than to her, and most likely she has forgotten the circumstance altogether."

"And does any one else know of them? Any one in England, I mean?"

"Certainly not."

"Or know that you have the preparation here with you?"

"No; the dressing-case is always locked."

Mr. Witherby made a further pause, during which he drew his chair nearer to his companion. Then he put his final question.

"Do we understand each other, then, Mrs. Rayner?" he asked.

Paulina's chest heaved violently. "Do you mean that I should . . ."

She could not complete her sentence, but Mr. Witherby replied to it as if actually uttered.

"You must see yourself," he said, "that it is your only chance. Give some trifling quantity; say at luncheon every day, or dinner, or perhaps both; nothing can be easier."

Still Paulina hesitated. Latent within were still germs of some good; undeveloped, overlaid with cupidity and self-indulgence, but not wholly eradicated.

"It is such a terrible thing to do," she urged.

"Why terrible? Where is the risk; who is even to suspect anything? Failure and detection are alike impossible."

"I was thinking of Evelyn herself," Paulina said. "She has been often kind to me; she is one of the few persons who ever have been."

"You were less scrupulous with her grandfather," said Mr. Witherby, rising; "however, it is your own matter. If you do not choose to follow my advice, I cannot help it."

Paulina buried her face in her hands. The struggle had become internal now; passed into the house of life, the domain of heart and conscience. On the threshold lingered the good angel, loth to depart. From within rose the din of voices, caged forces of evil, waiting only the pass-word for their liberation!

And Mr. Witherby's taunt supplied this. There is no compulsion to guilt like the unrepentance of the past. You are accursed; you have sinned already beyond hope. Blaspheme God, and die!

"I will see what can be done," Paulina said at last, although still without looking up.

And the confederates separated; Mr. Witherby, as he had arranged, locating himself at Llandudno for the ensuing few weeks.

## CHAPTER XX.

ONCE more, a sea view, stretching into miles of distance. Evelyn once more at the open window, looking at it.


Not that Brighton sea of old, rolling in from the Atlantic ; wave heaving after wave, the furrows of the great ocean-field, shrouding beneath it what she had loved best on earth.

A different sea now ; and far different emotions in the person who gazed at it. Malcolm had not perished ; he was safe ; well, doubtless ; would ere long return to her. Return with the knowledge that there was no real barrier between them ; that such obstacles as still existed might, by skill and management, be surmounted. No need for dark anticipations now.



And yet, do what she would, Evelyn felt at times an unaccountable gloom creeping over her. Depression, rather; fastening upon her in a way which it was impossible to shake off. Especially was this the case during the last few days of the fortnight she had already spent at Llandudno. There was no external cause for it; the weather was bright and exhilarating; the place itself, although still in its infancy, lively enough to be attractive. Evelyn walked, drove, sketched, bathed. Paulina, although rarely her companion out of doors, was an unexceptionable hostess. Everything concurred to make life enjoyable. And yet, with all this, mastering her more and more, came this unexplained—depression!

A depression of a very singular kind; passing from mere sensation into the regions of movement and even volition. A kind of tardiness, inertness, as regarded both these. A feeling, at times, that it was a good deal of trouble *to move*; *to exercise any choice*; that if these processes could be performed by deputy, and Evelyn herself remain entirely



passive, it would be rather pleasant than otherwise!

Nor was this all. This languor, or whatever it was,—laziness, Evelyn herself called it,—was within her own control; it could be shaken off by an effort, more or less strong; and usually she made the effort. But there was something else, a concomitant and somewhat increasing ail, which could not be thus dealt with.

If the present exhibited itself now and then in the light of a burden, the *past* did so still more. Recollection became painful at some times, precarious at others; facts and dates, the best ascertained, the most familiar, lost their sharpness of outline; grew confused and ran into each other, as print does to a dim vision. Sometimes, vanished out of sight altogether!

Evelyn was puzzled, and slightly alarmed. She thought of asking medical advice, but there was neither ache nor infirmity to supply the data for it; the cause must be in herself. She had been over-excited, and this was some reaction; quiet and diversion of thought would soon remove it.

But they did not remove it. The mischief, wherever its origin lay, gained ground; slowly but steadily. Evelyn still chode herself for laziness;—"the necessary effort was not made, because she would not make it."—But somewhere, very deep down, there was at times the conviction that—*she could not!*

Meanwhile, Evelyn succeeded in one thing. Be this disorder what it might, mental or bodily, she was determined that it should not betray itself. Paulina should not discover it, or Mr. Witherby either!

Nor did they.

Without any appearance of being obtrusive, Mr. Witherby was a frequent visitor at the house. But at these times, especially, Evelyn put a strong force upon herself. She was there to keep an eye upon this man; it was the task deputed to her, as it were, by Malcolm himself; and she compelled nerve and fibre to execute it, hard as the struggle often was.

Becoming harder every hour. Evelyn must have succumbed ere long, but for a fortunate circumstance.

One afternoon, after a day of more than usual depression, she forced herself to a walk on the sands;—her own inclination, had she followed it, would have been to remain in her room upstairs, movement, speech, even thought itself in abeyance.

On her way out, Evelyn met their landlady; a bright little woman, with whom she often exchanged words. She did so now: put the question which she had been often on the point of asking; something impelled her to it. "Was there any medical man, either at Llandudno or Conway, who could be relied upon?"

At Llandudno none. At Conway, Mr. Evan Richards was in high repute; Mrs. Darke had no hesitation in recommending him.

"And, indeed, Miss," she added, "it's quite time you should see the doctor; we've been troubled to look at you lately, my daughter and myself; you've seemed so distraught like."

"Oh! there is not much the matter," said Evelyn, smiling. "I shall send for Mr. Richards, perhaps, in a day or two."

Mrs. Darke passed on upstairs ; but there had been an auditor of their conversation upon whom it was not lost.

Paulina had done what she undertook to do, but it was in fear and trembling. Tired as she had already become of Llandudno ; wearied with her long subjugation ; satisfied that her only escape from it lay in the plan sketched out by Mr. Witherby, she yet shrunk from its execution. There was still the same mixed feeling about it ; nervous dread of a crime, wholly *new* to her, and for which her organization was unfitted ; and compunction, almost sympathy, for the person upon whom it was to be practised.

And now, while Evelyn and Mrs. Darke were conversing, Paulina's door had been open throughout ; every syllable audible. " A medical man to be called in ! "—Paulina was panic-stricken ; realised, for the first time, what she had been doing. Her very success terrified her !

Let her stay her hand, for the present at all events. Chary as her administration of

the evil drug had hitherto been, let it now be suspended altogether !

Paulina did suspend it, and her visitor became conscious of an immediate change; the malady, whatever it was, seemed arrested. And Evelyn's uneasiness subsided also. She concluded that she had been needlessly alarmed. Recurred to her belief that what had troubled her was half accidental, half some fault of her own. And, did not send for Mr. Evan Richards.

There was another person, however, who was far from being equally contented.

Mr. Witherby knew nothing of what Paulina had overheard ; but it seemed plain that she was doing her work timorously, or negligently. Of the effect which even her hesitating use of the means in her hands had already produced, he had no suspicion. Evelyn met him, day after day, with no visible change ; entirely her usual self ; Mr. Witherby watched her narrowly, but could not satisfy himself that any results had been obtained. Now and then, indications seemed

to favour him ; then, these would pass away, and success be, apparently, as far off as ever.

At length, things reached a crisis.

The Wheal Eliza was more promising than ever ; becoming daily more intrinsically valuable, more attractive ; the general public still excluded, but certain not to remain so much longer. A few more months, perhaps weeks, and the golden opportunity would be lost. Mr. Witherby must act.

Put further force upon Paulina ?

It was the only thing to be done, and he was prepared to do it, when chance turned his thoughts into a new channel.

On the drawing-room table, one afternoon, evidently forgotten by the owner, lay Paulina's keys ; she and Evelyn were both out on the sands. Why should not Mr. Witherby become the possessor himself of a portion of this subtle agent ; *take the management henceforth into his own hands ?*

A wary scrutiny of stairs, landings, hall .

and passages ; no one moving, no overlooker, no chance of interruption

Paulina's room reached, in a few noiseless strides. The dressing-case unlocked ; the packet found, and a portion of the contents abstracted ; everything replaced as it had been. Less than five minutes from first to last, and Mr. Witherby had obtained the means of effecting his purpose !

He was not slow in making use of them.



## CHAPTER XXI.

THE following day, although the month was August, was stormy ; a bright sun, but with gusty high wind.

It was still the forenoon, between twelve and one. Paulina's hours were late as heretofore ; she had not left her room yet. Evelyn, notwithstanding the wind, was out walking ; she felt stronger and better than she had done for weeks past ;—at one, as Mr. Witherby knew, she would return for luncheon. He had brought some business papers with him to the house, and sate in the dining-room, writing and extracting from them. "He would see Mrs. Rayner when she came down stairs."

At a quarter to one, luncheon was brought in as usual. The servant placed the decanters on the table, with a bottle of claret ;

the latter was the only wine which Evelyn took. The room had a bay-window ; two of the Venetian blinds were already down, and the sun had now reached the third bay.

" Shall I let down the other blind, sir ?" the girl asked.

" Thank you, do, if you please," answered Mr. Witherby. The blind was lowered, and the maid left the room.

It was the opportunity on which Mr. Witherby, with his knowledge of the house and its inmates, had expressly calculated. He opened the door cautiously, and reclosed it ; then his task was easily despatched. The powder which he had abstracted the day before was in a paper with him, ready for use. Everything had been arranged ; everything thought out beforehand.

Everything, with one exception :—Mr. Witherby had no idea what *the proper quantity* should be. What he had gathered from Paulina was only in the most general terms.

However, he must let chance decide this. What he took from the paper in the first instance seemed obviously too much. He

put it back, and shook out a few grains only into the claret. Then he thought he had erred in the opposite extreme, and added more. Not quite clear to his mind, how much more : like Paulina, this was his first practice of the kind, and his hand unavoidably shook a good deal. However, it could not be helped now ; the thing was done. A trifling error in excess could hardly be material !

Material or not, Mr. Witherby did not wait to see the result of his experiment. Ringing the bell, he left his compliments for Mrs. Rayner : "he had been unable to complete the papers to-day, and would see her upon them some other time." Then he quitted the house. Two or three hours later, he would return there ; easier to judge by that time how he was succeeding.

In point of fact, Mr. Witherby went as far from the house as he well could : the nervousness which had attended his début in this new line was still unpleasantly dominant. The air on the "Orme's Head" would dissi-

pate it;—and the “Orme’s Head” was the point in Llandudno furthest removed from the scene of his late operations. Let the needful interval be passed there!

Starting up from the sandy isthmus of the new watering place, a scarped cliff, haunted by myriads of sea-fowl, juts out into the Channel. In parts, the scarp is five hundred feet vertical; a dizzy height, from the base of which the sea never recedes, plashing incessantly in and out of the gloomy caverns which it has worn since land and ocean became opposing forces.

The upper portion of the promontory is a steep grass slope, and formerly the cliffs could only be seen by following the sheep-tracks on the side of this. Since Llandudno rose into consequence, however, a path has been cut round the Head; and this was commenced at the date of which we write, although then stopping abruptly, through want of funds, some half-mile from the town.

Mr. Witherby pursued this path to its termination, and seated himself on the broken rock left when the work was suspended.

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The spot was lonely enough ; lonely at all times, and at present, especially so ; few of the visitors to Llandudno cared to be abroad on such a day, and those who did, selected a walk less exposed. Mr. Witherby had abundant leisure for reflection.

But somehow, he did not care for much reflection ; the thoughts which did present themselves were of too gloomy a cast. Fancy would conjure up nothing which he wished. A few weeks hence, and he might be the millionaire ; the fortune which had flitted before his eyes, always just within arms'-length and always just eluding his grasp, might be really his own ;—opulence would beget opulence. He tried to picture all this, but it fled from him.

In its place, came a strange, dull feeling of *apprehension*. Hard to say, of what. It did not connect itself with his present crime ; did not point to miscarriage of any kind in that quarter. If it were identified with anything at all, it was with these external elements ; the boisterous wind which tore round him ; the screaming of the sea-fowl

overhead; the water which chafed and eddied so many hundred feet beneath.

Why had he selected this dismal spot? anywhere else would have been better. Supposing he were to retrace his steps now?

No. Mr. Witherby did not care to do *that*. He sate on, still listening to the tumult of sound round him; still gazing down, with no settled purpose, but with an impulse which he could not resist, on the masses of seething water. Sate on, probably for an hour or two. But then came an interruption.

Portions of the pathway which he had followed were visible where he sate, and his eye was caught by the flutter of a female dress on one of these. He looked up, but the person approaching had disappeared round a corner.

Some minutes elapsed, and then he saw the figure again, almost close at hand. Saw, and identified now. It was Paulina. She rounded the last curve, and stood face to face with him.

She was profoundly agitated; far too much so even to speak for some time. She could only point, beckoning him to come back with her.

"What was the matter?" Mr. Witherby's voice shook, in spite of himself;—could anything have gone wrong?

"You have killed her," Paulina at length exclaimed; "at least I suspect now it was your doing; it only occurred to me on my way here. You have been tampering somehow with that powder."

Mr. Witherby looked up in surprise; alarmed as he was, he could not help noticing Paulina's altered tone. His mastery over her was gone for all time!

"Killed her?" he replied. "What do you mean?"

"You know perfectly what I mean; you were in the dining-room alone before luncheon. Yes, and I know now how you got it; my keys were left out yesterday, I remember."

"But do you mean that she is . . .?"

"Not dead," said Paulina, supplying the

word, "but as ill as it is possible to be; in a stupor, or swoon of some kind. She left the table at luncheon, and I went up and found her in this state."

"Does any one else know of it?" asked Mr. Witherby.

"No."

"Or know of your coming here?"

"No; I met nobody. I saw you were not on the sands, and came here as the most likely place: we must have advice immediately. There is a doctor at Conway; you must drive over at once, and bring him back with you."

"Bring a doctor back with me!" exclaimed Mr. Witherby, who had rallied from his first consternation. "Are you insane? Everything will be found out!"

"I cannot help that," said Paulina. "Evelyn will die if she is left like this; she had a most serious illness three years ago. We may be too late as it is."

Mr. Witherby made no reply for a minute. But while Paulina was speaking, he changed his own position on the pathway; it was



wide enough to allow of his passing her, and he now placed himself between her and Llandudno. Then he spoke.

"You seem unusually concerned for your step-daughter, Mrs. Rayner. I did not know that there was so much attachment between you."

Paulina felt the sneer, but was not moved by it; her native timidity, driven into an opposite direction by this new apprehension, proved too strong now for her opponent.

"At all events," she said, "I do not mean to bring this further guilt upon myself: I have done quite enough at your bidding already. If you do not drive over to Conway, I must go. Let me pass, if you please."

"And get hung myself, I suppose! Come, Mrs. Rayner, you must listen to reason about this."

"I shall listen to nothing," said Paulina. "I insist upon your letting me pass."

"Insisting will not do much good," said Mr. Witherby. "Go back to Llandudno you shall not, if I can prevent it." And he placed himself so as effectually to command the pathway.

But Paulina did not give up her purpose. Light of foot, and accustomed at Amalfi to rough climbing, she sprung up on the grass slope above them, eluding the grasp with which he tried to detain her. A minute more, and she would have been beyond his reach altogether.

But that minute proved fatal.

The grass was dry and slippery with the hot weather; and just as Paulina had reached one of the sheep-tracks which ran along it, she missed her footing; slid down a pace or two, and then fell backwards.

The fall was trifling enough in itself, and free from risk; the width of the footway saved her from being carried over the edge. But it was disastrous in other respects. Paulina had stretched out her right arm to save herself, and it was broken in two places; across the wrist, and at the elbow; she had struck it, in falling, against the jagged rock of the cutting.

The pain was excessive, that of the wrist especially, and Paulina became deadly faint.

But she recovered consciousness almost immediately. Some instinct warned her to do so ; prompted her to rouse herself with all the force that she could command.

It was indeed high time.

Mr. Witherby was standing close beside her. Already, during the moments she lay helplessly before him, he had decided on his course.

Paulina must not return to Llandudno ! Without her, he could contrive ; arrange ; easy to tide over matters ; who would know or suspect anything ? But once let her return to the lodging, fetch this Conway doctor, divulge everything, as she had threatened to do,—and he was lost : immediate exposure must follow. Exposure ! Yes, and how much more ! Prosecution ; penal servitude ; should Evelyn not recover, even his life in jeopardy !

But it should not be ; the sea below them would tell no tales. He looked at it ; looked at her ; and the devil of murder rose up, strong and fierce, within him.

Paulina saw it, and prepared for the

death-struggle. On the bank immediately above grew some dwarf-bushes; something to hold on by, could she reach them. Her left arm was uninjured, and she tried to do so. But ineffectually; they were just too far off, and she had no means of raising herself.

Nearer at hand, however, was something which would answer the purpose. The limestone rock, cut straight down for a foot or two at the side of the path, was full of natural fissures; and in desperation she thrust her arm into one of these. In the next moment, the assassin's grip was upon her; on her throat, round her waist, striving to drag her to the cliff's side.

It was more difficult than he had supposed. Every nerve and sinew in his victim was roused to resistance; their hold upon the rock tightened convulsively. Even his man's strength was at fault.

Finding this, Mr. Witherby changed his attack; let him force Paulina's arm out of the crevice, and she would be at his mercy. Stooping forward, and placing one knee on a

projection of the rock, he prepared to do this.

His own position, however, was precarious ; the dwarf-bushes above them caught his eye, as they had done her's, and he passed one arm round the nearest. Exactly the support he needed !

One fierce wrench ; savage, almost vindictive ; without remorse or compunction for the agony it caused. One wrench ; and the next must succeed ; Paulina's strength was exhausted. His grip was upon her once more, but in a new place ; higher up this time, above the elbow ; the leverage was better thus.

But instead of tightening, it suddenly relaxed ; the hand was withdrawn, in the impulse of self-preservation. But it was withdrawn ineffectually.

A recoil backwards. A clatter of stones and rubbish. An outcry of wild terror. Then, in the next moment, Mr. Witherby was precipitated over the cliff ; still grasping the bush on which he had thrown his weight, but which, in reality holding only by the

surface soil, had been inadequate longer to support it.

It was all a minute's work. Half-a-dozen gulls, startled from their rock-perch by the noise, wheeled round the spot in circles, screaming and flapping their wings. But no other sound was audible; nothing but the wind and sea as before. Somewhere in those cavernous depths, too far down for human ear to catch the faintest echo of *that* feeble plash, the wretched man finally disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Is there any letter for me from Miss Rayner?" asked Eldon Bligh; almost before he had time to reply to Miss Bligh's congratulations on his safe arrival at Chelmsford, some two months after the incidents of our last chapter.

"Letter for you? Letter from Miss Rayner?" echoed his relative. "Good Heavens, Eldon, do you not know?"

"Know what, aunt? I only landed this morning, and went to chambers before coming to you; I thought it most likely she would have been written to me there."

"Written to you?" Miss Bligh again exclaimed. "But no, of course you have not heard of it. Poor girl, it is so terrible!" And Miss Bligh, who had become warmly attached to Evelyn, burst into tears.

"What . . . what do you mean?" asked Eldon in great agitation. "Surely she is not dead?"

"Better almost that she were. But it is a long story, and you must have some refreshment first."

"Not one morsel; not one drop," said Eldon. "If it will shorten matters, I had better tell you that I know part of the story already. When I left England, she had gone on a visit to her stepmother, Mrs. Charles Rayner: she had an object in doing so which was of the utmost importance, and in which I had endeavoured to assist her. What has happened since?"

"What has happened," said Miss Bligh, "is that her stepmother has poisoned her; or rather, not the stepmother, but a solicitor into whose power the woman seems to have fallen."

"Mr. Witherby?"

"Yes, that is the name. There was some deed, some mortgage or the other . . ."

"Yes, yes, I have heard about that," interrupted Eldon. "But what did they do;



what has happened to Eve . . .? I mean, to the young lady herself?"

"Something most sad," answered Miss Bligh. "I fear the mind is hopelessly gone; it was the effect of the poison to cause this; 'aphasia' the doctors call it. They like hard names."

"Easy enough that one," said Eldon. "But go on, please. How did it all happen?"

"Through that Mr. Witherby. They meant to have stopped a great deal short of this, brought her to a state in which she would be entirely under their control; but by mistake, he gave her an overdose. The plan was his own diabolical suggestion, it seems."

Eldon could not reply for some time; he found it difficult not to follow Miss Bligh's example.

"Where is she?" he asked at length.

"Evelyn, do you mean?"

"Yes, yes, of course." I beg your pardon, "he added, but I can hardly tell you how all this affects me. Please go on."

Miss Bligh looked up at the speaker, and,

for the first time, divined something of his past secret. She made no comment, however.

"Evelyn is at Chigwell," she said, "with the Alsagers: they were sent for when this occurred. It is through Mrs. Alsager that I have heard the story."

"I suppose Mr. Witherby got frightened," said Eldon.

"Mrs. Rayner did; it was that which led to her death. But I am forgetting again; all this is news to you."

"Utter news. Mrs. Rayner is dead, is she?"

"Yes; and Witherby too; it is one of the most dreadful parts of the story."

Miss Bligh then gave a brief account of what had happened at the Orme's Head, Eldon listening with profound interest.

"The body was never recovered, I believe," she added, with a shudder.

"I should think not," said Eldon; "I know what those Llandudno cliffs are. But what became of Mrs. Rayner?"

"It was several hours before she was discovered," said Miss Bligh. "The people

of the house became alarmed at her absence, and, still more so, at the condition in which they found Evelyn; and parties were sent out to search."

"And she had been lying without assistance all the time?"

"Yes. She could not tell them what had happened after Witherby's death, but probably she had swooned away again. The arm was frightfully injured, and it was this which proved fatal to her; it had to be amputated, and she sunk under the operation. Mrs. Alsager tells me she was quite penitent at the last."

"We will hope so, at all events," said Eldon. "Did she make any confession?"

"A most full one; sparing herself in no way: that is how Mrs. Alsager learnt the particulars. It was by Mrs. Rayner's advice, too, that they have brought the Italian doctor over here."

"Italian doctor?"

"Yes, Dr. Giuseppe something, I have forgotten the other name. He is at Chigwell now."

"Can he be of any use?" asked Eldon.

"Mrs. Rayner thought so; it was her principal concern in her last moments, and she urged it so much that they promised to send for him. She was half Italian herself, you know."

"So I have heard. But why fetch him particularly?"

"Why, it appears it was through him she became acquainted with this poison. It had been given her for a love-charm, or some other foolish purpose, and he warned her against playing tricks with it."

"Rather ineffectually, it seems," said Eldon; "however, he may do some good. And now I must say good-bye for the present; I must drive over to Chigwell myself, as soon as possible."

"Good gracious, Eldon," said Miss Bligh, "why should you? of what possible use can you be? But at all events you will stay for dinner?"

"No, please forgive me. There is another aspect of the story which I must at once talk over with Mrs. Alsager: she is the only

person who can advise about it. I am sorry to make mysteries, but you shall know all some day."

And Eldon took his departure accordingly.

Two hours later, he found himself at the Beeches.

It was with the utmost emotion that he entered the house. Evelyn was there, although, if his aunt's account was correct, cruelly changed from her real self! But, might there not be some exaggeration as to this? Impossible to think of her thus; the intellect obscured, the pleasant smile and frank greeting replaced by weakness and vacancy!

Eldon's passion had subsided, as, if only from the nature of his recent employment, it could not fail to do. But it had left behind it the liveliest interest in its object; he would not shut out any ray of hope which might still exist!

All the more so, because, meanwhile, his own mission had been entirely successful. Malcolm Rayner had been found, as Eldon

had promised he should be, and with no special difficulty.

At Fayal, Eldon ascertained that Malcolm had abandoned his intention of proceeding to Hobart's Town. No Tasmanian ship would sail for the next few weeks, and the interval would have to be passed in inaction. There was constant communication however with Buenos Ayres; and under these circumstances Malcolm decided on proceeding there, and obtaining some farming employment. This he had accordingly done, and Eldon followed him to that port. On reaching it, however, it appeared that Malcolm's station was some distance in the interior; and as his own time was exhausted, Eldon was compelled to forego the journey, and send a letter to the address instead.

Mrs. Alsager was at home, and Eldon at once entered on the business of his visit. Touching shortly on his own unsuccessful suit to Evelyn, and the conversation which had followed it, he explained the knowledge he had thereby acquired of hers and Mal-

colm's past history, and of the obstacles which then forbade their union; detailing, at the same time, the mode in which these had been since removed, partly by Andrew Patten's information, and partly by Paulina's betrayal of the document held by Mr. Witherby. All that remained was to recover this latter, which there would probably be little difficulty in doing.

Mrs. Alsager was deeply moved by this narrative. Evelyn's illness had prevented her obtaining the slightest clue to the facts, and she listened to them with breathless attention, and not without interest in the narrator himself, whose energetic and generous character appeared even in this rapid sketch.

"I observe," she said, when Eldon had concluded, "that you speak of all obstacles being removed. You are aware, I suppose, of my niece's present state."

"Unhappily, yes," said Eldon; "but I had hoped to find the account over-stated. Can it be possible . . ." He could not bring himself to complete the sentence.

"She is very ill," said Mrs. Alsager. "I

will not despair yet, but at times it is hard not to do so. There is no risk of a fatal termination, as there was at first ; but unless this strange stupor, or whatever it is, can be relieved, one could hardly wish her to live. The Italian, Dr. Sonzi, may do something."

"Has he expressed any opinion yet?"

"None whatever; he declines to do so; but he is most unremitting in his attendance. He is with her at present."

Eldon thought for a minute. "Might it not be well," he asked, "to put him in possession of the facts I have just told you? When the mind is affected, everything that can throw light upon its past history seems valuable."

Mrs. Alsager entirely agreed, and Giuseppe was requested to join them as soon as he could leave his patient. He came in a quarter of an hour, accompanied by Nina, whose Italian was of the utmost service.

"I see everything," he said, when Eldon's recapitulation had been translated to him. "Our poor Paolina; how she was drifting in

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the dark the whole time! But this young man, this Mr. Rayner," he continued; "is he in England?"

"No," answered Eldon, "he cannot be here for some days. He would doubtless start at once on receiving my letter, but he would take time getting down the country."

"So much the better," said Giuseppe. "If he can be of use I will send for him, but he is on no account to come here until I do. Remember, this is positive."

Compliance was promised, and Giuseppe returned to his charge, although still declining to express any opinion as to Evelyn's state.

"I must watch her," he answered, in reply to the questions which Eldon pressed upon him; "watch for another seven days, at least. What is to-day?"

"Tuesday," said Eldon.

"Well, then, come back to-morrow week, and I will tell you what I think. But mind, you, and only you; not Mr. Rayner."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

It need not be said that Eldon was true to his appointment.

During the interval, he had arranged a matter of the utmost importance in Malcolm's interest;—the recovery of the document of which Mr. Witherby had fraudulently possessed himself.

As Eldon had anticipated, this was easily managed. Mrs. Witherby was still at Caversham, and, on being apprised of the circumstances, exerted herself to repair the wrong done by her husband. With her assistance and that of one of the clerks, the office was searched, and the paper ultimately discovered in the private drawer where it had been secured. Eldon took it back with him to town; and, under his instructions, proceedings were at once instituted for restoring the

property to its rightful owner, leaving the way open to his union with Evelyn, should her recovery be effected.

"Should she recover!" Everything centred upon this now.

It was with breathless anxiety that the party in the Beeches' drawing-room awaited Dr. Sonzi's verdict. He had paid Evelyn a final visit, and came down to them from her room. He looked anxious himself.

"You bring us good news, I trust?" asked Mrs. Alsager; Nina, as before, acting as interpreter.

"In one sense, yes," said Giuseppe. "I have observed her most narrowly, and am quite satisfied on one point; the mind is not impaired in any way. Once let it be roused, and it would speedily recover itself. But there is the difficulty."

"In rousing it, you mean?" said Eldon.

"Yes."

"Might not some powerful shock do it?"

Giuseppe drew in his lips. "I should not dare," he said. "It would rouse her,

doubtless, but it might prove fatal at the same time; overthrow the reason, at all events. This has happened more than once lately."

"In your own country, you mean?"

"Yes; the cases have been rather frequent during the last two or three years; so much so, that the government have now prohibited the sale or collection of the drug, under severe penalties. There was one frightful instance."

Mrs. Alsager shuddered. "Can nothing be attempted then?" she asked.

"No external force," said Giuseppe; "I would not be responsible for it. The effect, if produced at all, must be from within; the mind must help itself; wake up, so to speak, of its own accord."

"It seems hopeless that it should do so," said Mrs. Alsager. "Nothing seems capable even of attracting her notice; it is like a person in a trance."

"I should have thought it hopeless," said Giuseppe, "but for the facts which this gentleman stated to us the other day."

"In regard to young Rayner, you mean?" asked Eldon, who had already in part caught Giuseppe's idea.

"Yes. Love is a great magician, and may unlock this sealed chamber for us. Has Mr. Rayner arrived yet?"

"He may do so now at any hour," said Eldon; "certainly by to-morrow at latest. I had a letter from him yesterday, sent on shore by a Plymouth fishing-smack; he caught the packet at Buenos Ayres, and, with this wind, they will soon run up channel."

"That is well also," said Giuseppe; "I was most anxious that they should not meet until I had seen more of her, but now I am satisfied it is our best chance. The only question is as to the *mise en scène*."

"How do you mean?" asked Mrs. Alsager.

"I mean," said Giuseppe, "that I should like to give the experiment every chance. Their sudden meeting would stake everything on the one momentary action; it might fail, or, as I said before, the shock might be too great. What I should like,

would be preparation of some kind. Is there any special incident which we could reproduce connected with this Mr. Rayner? Anything which would recall him forcibly to her *before* he actually showed himself?"

"Unquestionably there is," said Eldon. "Miss Rayner became engaged under peculiar, almost romantic circumstances; they are too long to detail here, but their meeting took place at Stanton Court, and was a total surprise on both sides. I should think . . ."

"Aye, aye," said Giuseppe, rubbing his hands with great satisfaction: "that will do. My little Carlotta, at home, has the worst memory in the world; misquotes everything, and miscalls everybody; but I believe she could repeat every syllable of our talk on Amalfi beach five years ago, the evening I asked her to be my wife. What do you call the place?"

"Stanton Court," said Eldon. "Of course, I only know generally what passed; but Rayner, when he comes, can give full particulars."

“So let it be then,” said Giuseppe. “Let them meet at this Stanton Court, say the day after to-morrow; in the same room, at the same hour, and, as nearly as may be, under the same circumstances in every respect. I shall be there to watch; and this young lady, who speaks Italian so charmingly, with her mother and yourself, had better accompany me.”

And so it was arranged accordingly.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

STANTON Court once more ; the hopes and anxieties of all present concentrated on the momentous issue now to be tried.

The only unconcerned exterior was borne by the main actor in the scene, Evelyn herself. As she entered the house, and, still more so, when she found herself in the drawing-room where her recovery was to be attempted, some gleam of recognition seemed to pass over her face. But it vanished almost in the same instant. She became simply passive, as she had been throughout her illness ; remaining seated where she was placed, and evincing no consciousness of any of the objects which surrounded her. On the other hand, the expression of the face was by no means that of mere vacancy ; as Giuseppe had said, it was impossible to



watch it without feeling that the faculties remained clear and active, although some powerful obstruction precluded their exercise. Spell-bound, as it were, labouring under the stupor which the noxious drug had induced, the apprehensive force within seemed incapable of rousing itself to effort of any kind.

Once again, with a beating heart, Malcolm entered the conservatory, as he had done on his last memorable visit. The door between this and the drawing-room was left open, as it had then been; and Evelyn, as before, was the solitary occupant of the latter. The rest of the party had withdrawn to an adjoining apartment, from which they could observe all that passed.

Malcolm's programme was arranged in the fullest detail, and he lost no time in carrying it out. Placing himself at a short distance from the conservatory door, he began to whistle.

Whistled a well-remembered air; his own musical setting of "Wilhelmine." It was

agony to frame the sounds, recollecting all to which they had led on his last meeting with Evelyn; but he forced himself to do so. Whistled first two or three bars, and then the whole piece; low, but with as much distinctness as possible.

Hard to say whether Evelyn heard or not. To the spectators in the further room, it seemed as if she did; she raised her head for a moment, and a change of some kind passed over her face. Then the emotion, whatever it was, disappeared again.

Giuseppe had placed himself so that he could be seen by Malcolm, and he now signed to the latter to repeat the air. Malcolm did so, whistling it through as before.

But, this time, not without result.

As the notes ceased, Evelyn, who had been partly reclining on a sofa in the room, sat up, and raised one hand to her head, as if in perplexed thought. In the next moment she rose, and walked across the room to a cabinet on the further side. It was that from which she had taken Malcolm's manuscript on their last meeting.

The anxiety of the moment was overpowering; every breath was suspended. Malcolm could not restrain himself. He moved forward to the conservatory door, keeping just out of sight himself, but following with his eyes every movement which she made.

The next link in the chain of association was now needed, and fortunately it was at hand. The blurred, and now almost faded manuscript had been found by Nina, after a long search, amongst Evelyn's valuables, and was now lying, as it had lain years before, in the drawer of the cabinet. She took it up; pressed her lips passionately upon it, and recrossed the room to the piano

A few random notes, struck almost at hazard; a border-land of sound in which the mind still travelled, uncertain as yet of the familiar ground beyond. Then Evelyn played the piece through. Played the simple air once; and then, adding an accompaniment as before, sung the three stanzas to it.

Malcolm, meanwhile, had again changed his position. At a further sign from Giuseppe, he stepped noiselessly into the drawing-room, and, while Evelyn was singing, stood close behind her, almost touching her chair. The final signal was then given, and he advanced still further; stood by the side of the instrument, directly fronting her.

She recognized him at once, and spoke.

But quite mechanically; evidently with no consciousness of their present situation, or of any recent events at all. Her mind was busy with a still earlier scene;—the afternoon at Chigwell, when Malcolm had first produced his composition. "I am not sure," she said, "that this last bar is right. Ought not the second note to be an F?"

A feeling of bitter disappointment struck to the hearts of all present; it seemed as if the experiment had failed. Worse than failed: restored the mind to semi-consciousness, but left it incapable of anything beyond this. It was the very crisis of hope and fear.

For Malcolm, reply was wholly impossible;

speech and movement seemed arrested. Finding he did not answer, Evelyn raised her eyes from the paper, and met his.

Met; and, this time, with full recognition.

There was a moment still of suspense. Then, light and memory flashed back into the face, irradiating it with intense joy. "Malcolm! Malcolm!" she exclaimed, starting up from her seat, and hastening towards him.

But the effort was too great to be sustained at present. Bursting into tears, Evelyn sunk back on the chair; not fainting, but overpowered with a flood of contending feelings.

Giuseppe was by her side in a moment. "All leave the room," he said, "except her aunt and myself. It will be all right now."

## CHAPTER XXV.

PAGE and chapter both warn us that our tale must draw to a close; each has already reached the "regulation" limit.

Evelyn recovered gradually but entirely, and her union with Malcolm took place in the autumn of the same year. It was thought desirable, however, that she should pass the next winter in Italy; and Evelyn found so much pleasure in revisiting the scenes which she had known under different auspices, that their stay was in fact protracted over the winter following.

It was on a February afternoon of this second winter, that Eldon Bligh, having been to the city on business, found himself in one of the less frequented courts which open from its main arteries. He was traversing

it with a rapid step, when his attention was attracted by a little man in the dress of a foreign ecclesiastic, whose appearance interested him, although he could hardly have said for what reason.

Eldon paused, and observed that the stranger from time to time addressed some question to the passers by. Not, however, with much success. The greater part paid no attention to him; and those who did, after listening for a moment, shook their heads and walked on. Eldon was about to do the same, when he was accosted in his turn.

"Eerong mongjay lannie?" asked the little man, taking off a shovel hat which he wore, and bowing politely.

Eldon felt as helpless as his predecessors. "I beg your pardon," he replied courteously; "what did you say?"

"Eerong mongjay lannie?" repeated his companion, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

Eldon gathered his wits together, but could make nothing of it; he must pass on as those before him had done. He was

about to do so, when a sudden memory flashed across him. Instead of quitting the court, he grasped the stranger's hand, and shook it cordially.

"Fray Pedro!" he exclaimed, calling to his aid the Portuguese which he had acquired on his voyage to Pico; "what has brought you here? What can I do for you?"

Mutual recognition followed, and the Padre explained his immediate need first. "It is a place I want to find," he said; "one of your London streets."

"Have you it written down anywhere?"

The Padre joyfully produced a letter, on which Eldon read, "Messrs. Everett and Co., Ironmonger Lane."

"I pronounced it in French," said the Padre, "as I thought your people would understand it better. I want to find out about the journey to Devizes; I have a young friend whom I must take there, and we were told that those gentlemen would advise us about the coaches; they are agents for her aunt's husband."

"*Her* aunt's," Eldon repeated to himself.



His interest redoubled, as he recollected the vision which had dawned upon him at Las Riveiras. Was it destined to cross his path again ?

Yes ; destiny had so arranged ; and Eldon unquestionably did nothing to frustrate the dispensation. The nympholept has no volition left in him !

Nelly had been ailing, the Padre told him, for several months past. There had been a great trouble two years before, and, although she had shaken this off, she wanted change and bracing to rally thoroughly. He had suggested to Senhôr Miguel that she should pay her English relations a visit ; and, as there was no one else to escort her, the Padre had undertaken the charge himself. Nelly was wild with delight at the prospect, and, even on the voyage to England, had already gained greatly in health and strength. They had arrived the evening before, and after two or three days, nominally of rest, but probably, the Padre supposed, of sight-seeing in

London, would travel down to Wiltshire. Their hotel was the Belle Sauvage.

The Padre was conducted to Ironmonger Lane; and when his business was despatched, conducted back again to the hotel. There he was of course in safety, and Eldon *might* have returned to chambers.—What he in fact did, was to accompany the Padre indoors. And, finding himself indoors, he remained there the rest of the evening.

It is to be hoped that the Padre was not bored. It is quite certain that his lovely charge was not. She recollected Eldon perfectly; they talked the whole evening, and Eldon's escort was gratefully accepted for the sight-seeing of the three days which followed it. To Devizes he could not escort her; but Fray Pedro shared her visit there; and, in the course of the friendship which had been established between them, Eldon came there, more than once, to visit Fray Pedro.

With what eventual result the reader may learn from a conversation which took

place at Stanton Court in the May following. Evelyn and her husband had just returned home; several days later than they were expected.

"Who can this be from?" said Malcolm, taking up from the breakfast table a letter with the English postmark, but in superscription and folding unmistakably foreign: "I know the writing, somehow. Oh! what a pity!"

"What has happened?" asked Evelyn.

"Nothing serious, but I shall be so sorry if I have missed him."

"Missed whom?"

"Why, my old friend the Padre; Fray Pedro. You know whom I mean."

"Oh, yes," said Evelyn, laughing; "I am not very likely to forget that passage in your history. What has he written to you about?"

"Why, it seems that he and Nelly have been in England all the winter, staying at Devizes; she had an aunt living there, I remember. He asks me to come and see him; any day after the 22nd, he says."

"Well then, really," said Evelyn, "I cannot sanction any proceeding of the kind. If Nelly was what you describe her two years since, she must be irresistible now."

"You need not be alarmed," said Malcolm. "But I must write the Padre at once; it is the 25th now, and he will wonder he has not heard before. The letter must have been here some days."

Other matters cropped up, and the subject dropped for the present.

But at luncheon it was introduced anew, Evelyn taking the lead this time.

"Have you written to your friend the Padre?" she asked.

"Not yet," said Malcolm; "I shall do so this afternoon."

"You may accept his invitation now," said Evelyn; "the bird is flown."

"What bird?"

In reply, Evelyn handed him the Times, which had arrived by the second post; pointing, as she did so, to the "Marriages" column in the supplement.

Malcolm read as follows.

"On the 22nd inst., at the parish church, Devizes, Eldon Bligh, of the Middle Temple, Barrister-at-Law, to Ere-merinda Maria Govia Figariada Santo José Eleanor, only child of the late Thomas Arbuthnot, Esquire, of Terceira, Azores."

FINIS.

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